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The Colonial State and Rural Protests in Hong Kong

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The Colonial State and Rural Protests in Hong Kong

> We hate the English barbarians, who are about to enter our boundaries and take our land and will cause us endless evil. Day and night we fear the approaching danger. Certainly people are dissatisfied at this and have determined to resist the barbarians. If our firearms are not good we shall be unable to oppose the enemy. So we have appointed an exercise ground and gather all together as patriots to drill with firearms. To encourage proficiency rewards will be given. On the one hand, we shall be helping the government; on the other, we shall be saving ourselves from future trouble. Let all our friends and relatives bring their firearms to the ground and do what they can to extirpate the traitors. Our ancestors will be pleased and so will our neighbours. This is our sincere wish. Practice takes place every day.
>
> —Translation of a placard issued by a Ping Shan (Yuen Long) village organization prior to the British takeover of the New Territories in 1899.

> We the executive councillors of the New Territories Heung Yee Kuk would like to express our unreserved support and praise for the government's measures to maintain the peace, law and order of Hong Kong.
>
> —Translation of a public statement issued by the Heung Yee Kuk on 25 May 1967.

Between 1899 and 1967, it appears there was a dramatic reversal in the attitudes towards the colonial government among rural residents in the New Territories. In 1899, the British colonialists were barbarians to be driven away from their native land. In 1967, the colonial government seemed to have successfully staged a breakthrough in its relationship with the New Territories and

emerged as an indispensable force of law and order and a legitimate government over all of Hong Kong.

The acceptance, and indeed active support, by the New Territories' villagers (or their prominent representatives) of the British rule over Hong Kong is as puzzling as the remarkable stability in the urban areas over the period of colonial rule from a comparative perspective. In the postwar development literature, the conservative modernization literature argues that rapid development creates instability in society which ultimately leads to conflicts and protests. The rural society has been viewed as a traditional force which often resists the coming of modern values and social institutions. The radical dependency literature also predicts a high level of rural unrests in a developing society, but for different reasons. The imposition of political subjugation in the form of imperialism and colonialism is often sufficient cause for rebellion. Economic exploitation of the agrarian economy is also supposed to add fuel to agrarian unrest. Why has this not happened in Hong Kong?

In this paper, we are going to take a fresh look at this question and examine the basis for the political stability in the rural areas of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong. By tackling this issue, we also hope to contribute to the understanding of broader issues of colonial governance in Hong Kong and the relationship between state and society under British colonialism. We shall first review past attempts to answer the question of rural stability and pinpoint some of their shortcomings. Then, we shall delineate the development of colonial rule in the New Territories since the late nineteenth century. We shall divide our discussion into four different parts. The first looks at the situation of the New Territories prior to the imposition of British colonial rule. The second describes the process of colonization and the establishment of colonial governance over the area before the outbreak of the Pacific War. A third section turns to the postwar period and discusses the critical period of rapid socio-economic transformation in the New Territories. The fourth section then uses several cases to illustrate our argument.

The Literature

By now there is already a sizable literature addressing the "paradox of stability" (relative social and political stability in spite of rapid development) in Hong Kong (e.g. Lau 1982). In particular, "administrative absorption of politics" is a well known notion explaining the political stability of Hong Kong. According to King (1981), the British rulers relied on the strategy of synarchy and methods of elite-mass integration to ensure the stability of the colony. Under the synarchical principle, members of the Chinese elite were coopted into the administration process of the government, either by recruiting them into the Executive Council, Legislative Council, Urban Council and other formal consultation channels, or by consulting the elite informally on specific issues. In this way, any emerging leader in the community who was capable of mobilizing grassroots people and initiating political action against the state was coopted to be a partner of the government.

While King's focus is on the urban area, the notion of the "administrative absorption of politics" can easily be extended to the New Territories. Kuan and Lau (1981) find that in the rapid urbanization of the New Territories, the government relied heavily on the traditional leaders in the rural communities to facilitate the process of land resumption. The government offered the rural elite substantial material benefits in exchange for their cooperative attitude in rural development projects. This cooptation of the rural elite by the colonial state was expressed institutionally through the Heung Yee Kuk (HYK) and the Rural Committees consisting of leaders from the villages. They were both important parts of the government's rural administration (Miners 1975).

In the following section, we are going to focus on Kuan and Lau's (1979, 1981) studies on the question of rural stability which explicitly incorporates the thesis of administrative absorption. It also resonates with Lau's (1982) general model of Hong Kong society which postulates a "minimally-integrated socio-political

system" consisting of a highly autonomous colonial state apparatus, a utilitarian familistic Chinese society and administrative absorption as the linkages between the two entities. While there are numerous studies of Chinese villages in the New Territories, most of them are of a historical and anthropological nature which focus on a particular village or locality. Most help us greatly understand particular villages but fail to provide us with more generalizable arguments concerning the relationship between the colonial state and the villages. Kuan and Lau's works instead represent the culmination of the attempt by an earlier generation of scholars to grapple with the paradox of stability in Hong Kong from a more social scientific point of view. Only by building on their insights, and reflecting upon their shortcomings along the way, can we arrive at a more adequate understanding of the matrix of development of Hong Kong under British colonialism.

Kuan and Lau's guiding question is the familiar "paradox of stability" in the studies of modernization in the Third World, that is, why, given the rapid urbanization and modernization of the countryside, no large scale and sustained conflicts broke out in the New Territories? Though large-scale and rapid urbanization in the New Territories started only in the 1970s, they attempt to explain this stability by tracing the historical development of (colonial) state-rural community relationship throughout the colonial history from 1898 to the 1970s. They find in the New Territories a strategy parallel to the "administrative absorption of politics" strategy in the urban area. Local leaders with mobilizing capabilities were coopted into and under the influence of the state.

Before British rule, Kuan and Lau argue that there was little linkage between the local gentry elite and the imperial government. The local economy was largely self-sufficient; local political and social order was maintained not by the central government, but by the position of the gentry class in the villages and village organizations. With the coming of the British, the political self-government in the New Territories came to an end, though to the authors the British exerted little influence on the rural economy. While the penetration of the colonial government was not extensive and intensive, it did create a co-existence of the formal political structure of the colonial state and an informal structure of village leadership.

The informal and formal political structures were connected under a model of "indirect rule." The original rural leaders became the mediators between the colonial administrative structure and the villagers. The government officials had to rely on the rural leaders to obtain information about the villages and to make sure their policies were enacted. Due to this cooptation process, the rural leadership became differentiated into two distinct types. One was the traditional informal leaders or elders based on their seniority in their clans. Another was leaders based on their connection with the outside world, mainly the government. When the modernization process began to dissolve the communal solidarity of rural villages over the prewar period, the former kind of "traditional" leaders declined. It was the second kind of "modern" leaders who emerged as the pillar of colonial rule.

In the prewar period, the government's attitude towards rural leaders was generally supportive and sympathetic. The government's intervention in the selection of rural leaders was minimal; they seemed to have emerged spontaneously from the village community, on the basis of their education or their knowledge of the outside world. This period was regarded as the "golden age" of New Territories administration by the authors.

By the 1950s, with the tremendous expansion of the urban population, the government began to expand the urban area into the rural area. In doing this, the principle of indirect rule, the maintenance of the *status quo* in the New Territories, was violated. Hence, a new kind of administrative strategy was required for the rural Hong Kong in order to "smoothen the process of planned change." The primary direction of the government's strategy was to support the more "progressive" factions of the rural leaders. Kuan and Lau called the process the "resuscitation" of rural leadership. With the progress of modernization, rural leaders would have faded away without government intervention as communal solidarity declined. By giving some rural leaders an official status

and a role in colonial governance, their leadership role could be buttressed. In such a way, these rural leaders became a useful ally of the government in enacting its developmental policies in the New Territories. The new ruling strategy was termed "neo-indirect rule." On the one hand, the basic structure of indirect rule, i.e. the relying on the rural leaders to rule the New Territories, was not altered fundamentally, but, on the other hand, the ultimate goal of the indirect rule had been changed from maintaining the *status quo* of the New Territories into facilitating its "modernization."

The strategy of neo-indirect rule was essentially one of "incentive dispensation." Between the colonial state and village leaders, the colonial state exerted influence over the village leaders by manipulating the distribution of material benefits flowing from the developmental process. Information about the developmental plan not open to the public was highly valuable to the village leaders as it helped them predict the movement of land values in particular localities, enabling them to reap enormous profits in land deals. Compensation from the government in the course of land resumption also provided concrete material benefits to the leaders. By distributing these benefits to the cooperative village leaders and restricting benefits from less compliant ones, the government succeeded in soliciting cooperation from most of the rural leaders towards the government's developmental plans.

Between the village leaders and villagers, the same principle of "incentive dispensation" operated. Village leaders were also always successful in ensuring the cooperation of their villagers by manipulating the material benefits generated by the development process and meted out by the government. As a result, the development process of the rural area that began in the 1950s and culminated after the 1970s could be carried out smoothly through this strategy of manipulating the flow of material benefits.

We think that Lau and Kuan's historical narrative and their analysis of the critical period of planned development are important in that they attempted to offer an account of how the colonial institutions were geared towards the changing social structure in

the New Territories. Their argument is also useful in providing a macro interpretation of the overall changes in political structure and state-society relations. We do not think, however, that their arguments are flawless. With the benefit of the theoretical insights that can be gleaned from the new theories of state and colonial state in particular, we find their arguments wanting. Also, if we make a serious attempt to draw from the existing ethnographic and historical studies of the New Territories, we can also locate some gaps in their analyses.

A first question is what does "rural stability" mean. Kuan and Lau never attempt to define this crucial dependent variable in their analysis explicitly, but they appear to take it as the absence of large-scale anti-colonial or anti-governmental movements during the period of planned development, especially during the process of the state's appropriating land for development. Construed this way, we agree that the New Territories was relatively stable, compared with other Third World countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, parts of pre-liberation China or the early postwar Korea. Nevertheless, such a conception of the New Territories as peaceful and conflict-free is not entirely justified in that it overlooks other forms and sources of conflicts. For one thing, anti-colonial struggles did arise during the early colonial period. Throughout the period of colonial rule, the indigenous rural elite also engaged in a constant tug-of-war with the government to fight for their own interests. During the post Second World War years, a spate of ethnographic and anthropological studies unearthed a large number of conflicts between landlords and tenants, between indigenous inhabitants and new immigrants, and between rural villagers and the colonial government. Even Chau and Lau's (1982) study of the So Kwun Wat village mentioned a number of conflicts between the indigenous villagers and immigrant farmers. While we agree that large-scale anti-colonial struggles were not common in the New Territories, we should not ignore the occurrences of these smaller scale conflicts. In particular, what were the principal sources of these conflicts? Why did they not spread beyond their narrow confines and cumulated into

a larger scale resistance movement? Only by answering these questions can we have a better understanding of the relative stability in the New Territories under colonial rule.

Another problem concerns the changes that followed the British colonization. Their postulated stage of indirect rule assumes that the degree of penetration by the colonial state into the village level was very low, at least until the postwar years. Hence, the stability of the New Territories before the period of planned development (or neo-indirect rule) was actually based on the cooptation of community leaders into governmental consultative machinery. Young's (1994) discussion of the African colonial state, however, highlights a different, complex, process for building hegemony over the indigenous society. Young's delineation of the imperatives of the construction of colonial state contrasts sharply with Kuan and Lau's argument of "indirect rule," in which the presence of the colonial state in the New Territories was minimal in the early decades of colonial expansion. Here we are inclined more towards Young's interpretation of the colonization process. We believe that Kuan and Lau tend to underestimate the magnitude of change as a result of the colonial conquest.

Thirdly, Kuan and Lau argue that in the 1950s the traditional leaders of the New Territories were on the verge of total demise. Had it not been for the intervention of the government, the HYK would have met with its own demise. However, as Chung points out in his study of rural leadership, "the time frame of their 'resuscitation' is not clear" (1988:17). He argues that Kuan and Lau "have only supported their claim that rural leaders have declined in power with *post-1957* data.... If rural leaders could not maintain their vitality after the fifties, it might well be asked why they were 'resuscitated' by the government in the first place" (1988:17; emphasis in original). Indeed, we can go further and ask whether it is possible for the decline to set in *as a result of* the resuscitation in the 1950s. We therefore agree with Chung that "the concept of resuscitation" has only been used loosely, and sometimes inconsistently, in accounting for the relations between the rural leaders and the administration.

The resuscitation thesis lies at the core of Kuan and Lau's "administrative absorption" interpretation of rural stability: stability must be premised upon the establishment of some kind of linkage between the government and the rural communities through the cooptation of representative leaders from the communities themselves. Our analysis shall cast doubt on this thesis by arguing that what happened in the 1950s with respect to the HYK was not only to "revitalize" it but to "reconstitute" it according to the blueprint of the government. Whether the reconstituted HYK was representative of the rural communities in the New Territories was not a key issue, but whether they were supportive of governmental development programmes was. We shall also argue that the process of reconstitution was also part and parcel of the colonial state's long-standing efforts to build a governing coalition with specific segments of the rural leadership. Kuan and Lau appear to take the official definition of the effectiveness of the HYK for granted. In the eyes of government officials, the unreformed, conservative HYK leadership might have been perceived as ineffective *at mediating* between the government and the rural residents, but it did play a persistent role in mobilizing rural opposition to state development plans. Therefore, only by equating the HYK with a governmental "transmission belt," as the government did, could we say that it had been weakened in the 1950s, because the government did not want to deal with it any more. Looking at it from another perspective, we can say that the "resuscitation" *weakened* the HYK as a base for resisting state development plans. While we agree that the HYK did serve to reduce rural conflicts in the 1970s, we dispute Kuan and Lau's interpretation of the process.

A fourth problem of the thesis lies with the role of immigrant farmers. By their own account, Kuan and Lau recognize that immigrants who came to the New Territories after the Second World War were actually in the majority by the 1970s. From the information they quote, only about 20% of the total population in the New Territories were indigenous "original inhabitants" (1979:11). In Chau and Lau (1982), instances of conflict between the immigrant

farmers and their indigenous landlords are also reported, and between the former and the government in the land resumption process. The immigrants' position in the rural society as well as the parts they took in "disrupting" or "preserving" the rural stability that the colonial government wanted to maintain is therefore an important question. Were conflicts involving the immigrant farmers pervasive? If the answer is yes, it will cast doubt on the picture of rural stability presented in studies by Chau, Kuan and Lau. Even if the answer is negative and that the immigrant farmers had not taken part in sustained resistance to planned development, a more adequate interpretation of the reasons and the process must be fashioned. Chau and Lau seem to believe that the same administrative absorption strategy worked on the immigrants as well as on the original inhabitants in dampening rural conflicts. Our analysis suggests the picture was a bit more complicated than this.

A deeper question concerning Kuan and Lau's interpretation of social and political changes in the New Territories is its underlying assumption deriving from the modernization approach. In their view, the socio-economic transformation of rural society appears to have been an evolutionary and natural process which generated a "push-pull" effect to make more and more villagers abandon agricultural production and migrate to the city. At the same time, the modernization process eroded the traditional, earth-bound and particularistic rural communities based on kinship ties. For the authors, however, these socio-economic changes have been treated as spontaneous processes largely unrelated to state actions, at least not until the state embarked on the large-scale programme of planned development in the 1970s. This also converges with the authors' interpretation of the limited changes in the New Territories in the early colonial period. The New Territories has been viewed as a traditional enclave in a modernizing society, untouched by social and political changes which were basically an urban phenomenon. The colonization process merely superimposed a thin layer of administration largely irrelevant to the governance of the villages. In this paper, we shall

argue that the influence of the colonial state on the rural society was in fact bigger than they portrayed and that the process of modernization in the New Territories cannot be construed as autonomous from state action. Indeed, we shall argue that by and large state action in the New Territories long before the 1970s had laid the ground for the relatively "smooth" transition to planned development.

On the whole, while we recognize the contribution made by the first generation of scholars to our understanding of the social and political development of the New Territories, we feel there is a need to move beyond their models and postulates. The following sections shall discuss the development of state-society relations in three broad phases in the New Territories: late nineteenth century (pre-colonial), the first half of the twentieth century (colonization and colonial consolidation), and the postwar period (urbanization and socio-economic transformation). Our overall thrust is to qualify Kuan and Lau's assumptions of a smooth and "frictionless" development of the New Territories under British colonialism and their image of stagnant traditional rural villages. We also highlight the multifaceted penetration by the colonial state into the lives of the villagers, both before and after the Second World War. We also think that the position of the immigrant farmers in the rural society needs a deeper appreciation than it has been given in Kuan and Lau's studies.

Social and Economic Power in Pre-Colonial Xinan County

The so-called "New Territories" leased to the British in 1898 constituted about three-fifths of the Xinan County under the Ching Dynasty. Like some other administrative regions in imperial China, pre-colonial Xinan was made up of an agrarian economy with a high degree of self-sufficiency and was dominated by a gentry class whose power was based on the control of land and market, strong local military organizations, the monopolization of

the land tax, as well as their connections with the local government (or *yamen*).[1]

Before the Song Dynasty, Xinan was sparsely populated by the Tanka people, or boat people, around the islands and coastal areas. The inland was barren until ancestors of the Tangs (鄧族) came to settle in the northwest region (today Kam Tin area) in 973 AD. Then, came the Haus (侯族) and Pangs (彭族) during the Southern Song, the Lius (廖族) in late Yuan and the Mans (文族) in the Ming Dynasty. Coming from other parts of Guangdong, they were then regarded as the *punti* (indigenous) people and were known as the "five great clans."[2] Later, a large number of Hakka families from the north migrated into Xinan and established their villages. Despite the difference in languages, origins and history of these agrarian communities, however, they were similarly classified as the "original inhabitants" of the New Territories by the colonial administration in 1898 by virtue of their settlement there before the colonization.

The Tangs as Powerful Landlords

The power structure of the county was first reflected in the settlements of different lineages. Land in the county was classified into first, second and third classes according to the cultivation value. The best land in the northwestern area — the low flat land with high fertility and good water supply — was occupied by the Tangs. The Haus and Lius settled in the northern region with lands of moderate cultivation value. The Pangs were the poorest of all and farmed at the fringes of Sheung Shui area. The clans not only owned the land around their villages. Much of the cultivable areas in eastern New Territories, Hong Kong Island and even outlying islands were owned by the Tangs. In contrast, the other minor clans usually did not own land which was far away from their settlements.[3] The Hakka people, who came after the five great clans, could only establish their villages on the hilly and infertile lands with poor water supply. The ownership of their farmland was mostly claimed by the Tangs who appropriated a

portion of their harvest as land rent. The share of land rent ranged from 40% to 60% depending on the land's fertility and was paid in kind (Topley 1964:163; *Hong Kong Annual Report 1947*:47).

The landlord-tenant relation in Xinan was characterized by a system of perpetual tenancy or bottom-soil/top-soil system which was common in South China (Palmer 1987). Under the system, landlords could only have bottom-soil rights, or the rights to collect rent. They could neither expel their tenants nor increase the land rent (in terms of a proportion of the harvest). On the other hand, tenants owned top-soil rights, or the rights to cultivate. They had the rights to stay on their farmland perpetually or sell their rights to other villagers without notifying the landlords, as long as they paid their rent. While this system of perpetual tenancy might be less exploitative than other forms of insecure tenancy, tenants in Xinan were still subjected to various forms of abuse by their landlords.

One source of conflicts was between the rent collection teams hired by the Tangs and their Hakka tenants. In reaction to the frequent abuses by these agents, the Hakka villages gradually organized themselves into local defence alliances or *yuek* (約). There were occasions when the coercion of landlords was so intolerable that violent rent resistances were initiated to expel the collection teams (Faure 1986:38).[4] The great clans also exploited weaker villages through the practice of charging "protection money" from the latter (Baker 1966:34-35). Wealthy lineages, with a larger population, often organized their young kinsmen into watchman teams which sometimes became another kind of ruffian organizations. They not only protected their own lineage against bandits and thieves, but also claimed to "protect" the surrounding weaker villages and demanded a remuneration. This "security system" was another bone of inter-lineage contention. Sometimes the "protected villages" might unite to organize their own watchmen team and try to move themselves away from the shadows of the powerful clans.[5]

Another mean for the great clans to appropriate surplus was the control of the market town. Before the nineteenth century, Tai

Po Market (or Tai Po Old Market) and Yuen Long Market were the two largest ones in the present New Territories, controlled respectively by two Tang clans. They charged rent from the shops in the market, imposed a basket tax on persons entering the market with a basket (almost everybody) and demanded a service charge on goods (Groves 1964; Faure 1986; Kamm 1977). The last and most effective mode of surplus appropriation by the clans was their monopolization of tax collection. Local magistrates in Xinan were simply too weak to enforce tax collection, and they had to depend on the local gentry to fulfil tax quotas. The gentry from the Tangs was responsible for collecting taxes in the area (Kamm 1977:73-76). Sizable commissions were extracted by these taxlords from the revenue collected. Taxes imposed on owners of bottom-soil were also transferred to the tenants (Faure 1986:129).[6]

Community Power Structure

The Tangs, as other members of the Chinese gentry class, based their power not only on their wealth accumulated locally, but also on their holding of official status through imperial examinations, which was by no means an "equal opportunity" system. In Xinan, the poor Hakka people were discriminated against under a quota system whereby eight *punti* candidates were allowed to pass the examination in Canton compared with only two Hakka (Baker 1966:27).[7] It is not surprising to find in the Xinan gazette that most of the officials listed were surnamed Man, Hau, Liu, and especially Tang.

Holding office allowed the great clan leaders to build connections with state bureaucrats (or became bureaucrats themselves). It was a great guarantee of wealth and power. All of the above mentioned means of wealth accumulation were protected by the clansmen's close relation with the local government: the government validated the sometimes arbitrary claim to the status of "first cultivator" leading to the right to collect rent; it granted privileges of collecting land tax on its behalf; it gave permission for the opening and closing of a market; it even arbitrated disputes between the lineages, and between landlords and tenants. Support from the magistrates also meant military backup for the actions of the great clans. When conflicts between clans escalated to the point the local militia could not resolve, intervention by the imperial troops would become determinant.[8]

At the village or lineage level, leadership positions were assigned formally to the "ritual leaders" who got the position by their seniority. They were responsible for managing lineage's collectively-owned lands, organizing religious rituals and arbitrating disputes between lineage members. In the villages, there was usually a kind of informal leaders known as "community leaders" (Chung 1988) or "village governor" (Freedman 1966) who gained influences by virtue of their ability to accumulate wealth and building connections with the outside world, particularly the imperial state. The relative influence of the formal and informal leaders varied from village to village. But, at a higher level of clan, the "community leaders" usually dominated. It was especially so if the "community leaders" had gentry status. Certainly, as Skocpol (1979) suggests, the landlord-gentry class was a layer of brokerage between the state and local communities.

In the nineteenth century and especially after the occupation of the Hong Kong Island by the British, however, the power of the Xinan gentry and the major clans began to decline. Expansion of world trade created new opportunities for the poor Hakka villagers in coastal areas to accumulate wealth as Xinan was situated at a nodal point of the trade route.[9] Some Hakka villages soon got very rich, and their leaders rich enough to buy offices in the magistrate. The increasing wealth allowed them to form larger and stronger alliances against the Tang clans (Faure 1986). On the other side, the trade expansion attracted more inland population, mostly Hakka, to come to Xinan and establish their villages here. The increasing population and number of villages, together with the strengthening alliances of these villages, made it difficult for the Tangs to control the land far away from their settlements. It was noted that, since the nineteenth century, many Tang families had been selling out their bottom-soil rights. The power structure

of inland Xinan underwent a decentralization process throughout the nineteenth century. The colonization of this area in 1898 was then a final blow to the declining Tangs.

Early Colonial Period: Institutionalization of Colonial Rule

The Uprising of the Great Clans

The southern Xinan district was leased to the British as its "New Territories" in 1898. Though it was only regarded as a buffer between the Victoria City and China, the colonial authority was active in penetrating into this rural area. Despite the colonizers' guarantee of "sympathy with native custom and prejudice," the construction of the colonial administration there did bring to the agrarian communities a "great transformation," laying the foundation for future development in the postwar years[10] (Lockhart 1899:178; Chun 1987).

The first imperative of the construction of a colonial state is building hegemony. The state needs to pacify any resistance to the colonization and establish "effective occupation." As Young (1994:100) put it:

> The hegemony imperative... immediately required a skeletal grid of regional administration. Its priorities were clear, its tasks minimal: the imposition of basic order and the creation of a revenue flow. Its means were also slender, above all its ultimate coercive capacity as demonstrated in the conquest phase.

In the case of Hong Kong, the early phase of colonization was characterized by a wave of uprisings against the British conquest. After noticing the coming of the British, leaders of the great clans gathered together in the Tangs' ancestral halls and market towns for several meetings to discuss the issue. The landlords were afraid of the British occupation as they predicted:

> [T]hat under English law a poll tax would be collected; that houses would be numbered and a charge made therefor; that fishing and woodcutting would be prohibited; that women and girls would be outraged; that births and deaths would be registered; that cattle and pigs would be destroyed; that police stations would be erected, which would ruin the *fung shui* of the place. In short, that the evils that would arise would be so great that one could not bear to think of them. (quoted in Groves 1969:43)

The landlords reached the conclusion to organize a resistance against the "red barbarians." Local militias of the clans were put together, and strong adults in Hakka villages were recruited by rumours and coercion.[11] The Tangs assumed the leadership of the movement, and a command centre was established in Ping Shan.

The British had planned to raise their flag on a hill in Tai Po on 17 April 1899 symbolizing the takeover; a unit of soldiers were sent to the site for preparation on 14 April. The battle between the two sides began when the resistance forces hiding in the hills nearby fired on the British. In the following days, reinforcement was sent from both sides. The resistance force rose to a total of two thousand villagers, with canons and rifles. Yet, as they did not receive support from the Chinese government, their organizational and logistic problems soon gave the British regular army an overwhelming advantage. On 18 April, the uprising nearly broke down. The British chased into the Lam Tsuen Valley leading to the northwestern New Territories, the base of the Tangs, and launched a final assault on the rebels.

After defeating the rebellion, the colonial authority raided the command centres in Ping Shan and Kam Tin to seize the remaining weapons. Some leaders were arrested while some fled to inland China. The first police station in the New Territories was set on top of a hill overlooking the whole Ping Shan area. Once in military control of the New Territories, the British reacted to the resistance from the landlord-gentry class by adopting a ruling strategy initially aimed at levelling their power rather than seeking an alliance with them. It was duly reflected in the early institu-

tionalization of a colonial rule characterized by the imposition of private land ownership and the implementation of a "rational" taxation system.

Reform on Land Ownership and Taxation System

Between June 1900 and June 1903, an extensive land survey was implemented by the colonial administration. Villagers were summoned to submit their land deeds to the colonial officials and were issued a Block Crown Lease in return. Any non-registered land would be converted into Crown Land. As mentioned before, all ownerships of land in the New Territories had been divided into top-soil rights and bottom-soil rights. So, there existed two kinds of land deeds for any piece of land — a "white deed" and a "red deed" — signifying each kind of landownership right, respectively. Most red deeds (bottom-soil rights) in the Colony were owned by the Tangs, and white deeds (top-soil rights) by tenant farmers in Hakka villages (Palmer 1987). To dismantle the great clans' power over the Hakkas, the British replaced this dual ownership of land by a unique ownership system and granted the ownership to holders of white deeds, exclusively. In this way, a "land revolution" (Chun 1987) was engineered by the colonizers depriving the great clans of most of their landholdings rented to the Hakkas. After the "revolution," the tenant farmers were "liberated" and became owner cultivators cultivating their own land. A decentralized system of landownership was instituted. We will see later how it shaped the form of rural resistance during the period of planned development after 1950.

Nineteenth century colonialism was largely premised, with few exceptions, upon the principle of financial self-sufficiency (Young 1994). In the British case, it was pursued even more rigorously. While the metropolitan government would be willing to shoulder the cost of the conquest and occupation of new territories, it expected the colonial administration to be largely on their own, at least financially. Hence, another imperative for the new colonial government in rural Hong Kong was to ensure a steady

flow of revenue. In the urban area of Hong Kong, property tax and rates constituted a large portion of the state revenue, since customs duties were limited as a result of Hong Kong's free port status. In the New Territories, tax had to be imposed on land. More importantly, taxation had to be conducted in a rational and predictable manner. Under the above considerations, taxlordism under the imperial state was abolished, and a modern taxation system imposed after the land survey. Taxes were charged on each inch of agricultural land and housing land (housing land was not taxed under imperial rule) and were collected directly from each owner of the property rather than through the gentry. In doing this, the Tangs' privileges of extracting commission from state revenue were stripped away.[12] Unlike the imperial government which collected taxes in kind, the colonizers collected taxes in cash. This prompted the villagers to enter the cash economy and hence helped erode the self-subsistence of the agrarian communities in the New Territories.

Four District Offices were founded in four administrative regions of the New Territories. They performed such functions as arbitrating disputes between villagers, collecting information about village life for the state, informing the villagers of government policies and collecting taxes.[13] New Territories people, especially those from the Hakka villages, gradually got used to ask District Officers for help rather than elders and gentry in the great clans when they had problems (Freedman 1966:5-6). The villagers gradually found that the District Officers were less biased towards the Tangs compared with the Ching magistrates. This was hinted at in a Colonial Secretary's letter in 1899:

> The elders of the small villages expressed a hope that they would be specially protected from the bullying they have been experiencing from large villages, and I informed them that protection would be afforded to all, whether strong or weak. (Lockhart 1899:57)

Repressed militarily,[14] economically and politically, the great clans were crippled in their efforts at resisting colonial rule. What they could do then was to send humble petition letters to the

government expressing their opinions. They also tried to organize themselves into voluntary associations acceptable to the colonial state. In 1926, leaders from the great clans gathered to form the HYK. New Territories people were allowed to join the HYK if they donated a certain among of money to it. This made the HYK an association of wealthy villagers, and it was dominated by the great clans, especially the Tangs, who still profited from their control of market towns. A constitution was adopted to prevent the colonial government from misinterpreting the HYK as a rebellious organization. This constitution confined the HYK's activities to (1) the initiation and support of local charitable work; (2) the promotion of local interests; (3) the rectification of undesirable customs and activities; (4) the airing and redressing of local grievances (Lee 1984:166). From the beginning, the HYK largely represented the great clans' interests and actively called for reforms of government's taxation and land policies. However, it was not a very powerful organization before the war and its influence was not extended to the southern part of the New Territories. Lee notices that the HYK was rarely mentioned by the District Officers in their reports (Lee 1984:167).

In these ways, the colonial state successfully replaced the preexisting hegemony of the gentry-landlord class with its own hegemony in the New Territories. This laid the political and economic framework of colonial domination, leading to the postwar patterns of development and constrained resistance. In contrast to Kuan and Lau's formulation that indirect rule and minimal intervention into rural communities were maintained in the prewar period, we argue that the colonial state had in fact imposed its substantial influence on rural communities and transformed their socio-economic configurations considerably since the early period of colonial rule.

Postwar Development: Expansion of the Colonial State

Before the Second World War, the New Territories were no more than a buffer of defence between the mainland and the city of Victoria. There were few construction works in the region, except the building of the Kowloon-Canton railway and roads for military and administrative purposes. While legal and administrative frameworks (the imposition of private land ownership and the system of District Offices) for economic and political intervention by the colonial state had been laid out before the war, the colonizers had not been interested in utilizing these frameworks to develop the area. The *raison d'être* of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong was trade, not agrarian or primary extraction; the New Territories had no immediate economic significance to the colonial administration, although they were expected to supply a portion of the food consumption for the urban area.

The situation changed in the 1950s when the influx of immigrants and industrialization in urban areas prompted the state to intervene more deeply and directly into the New Territories. First, land was appropriated extensively from the villagers for development purpose, such as building a reservoir for the urban population and providing space for new industrial or residential towns (Bristow 1984). Secondly, agricultural production was increasingly put under the colonial state's regulation. While the government had not intervened and supported specifically the industrial takeoff directly owing to historical and institutional constraints (Chiu 1996), it resorted to a varieties of administrative means to lower the cost of labour reproduction in general (Schiffer 1991). One of these means was the intensive intervention into the production and trade (both domestic and international) of agricultural products to ensure a stable provision of essential foodstuffs at low prices.

The administrative apparatus was also reconstituted and new institutions invented by the state to facilitate its increased involve-

ment into New Territories affairs. This included the creation of Rural Committees and the forced reconstitution of HYK in the realm of politics, as well as the establishment of local cooperatives and the Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO) serving both economic and social purposes.

Reconstitution of Rural Politics

Though the Tangs and other great clans had declined since the nineteenth century and been deprived of their political and economic privileges in the process of colonization, and most Hakka villages had been detached from their control, they were still wealthy and influential in rural Hong Kong. After the war, a sign of their influence was their control of the HYK until the late 1950s. The conservatism of this once powerful gentry class and its domination of the HYK made it an oppositional agency hostile to the colonial government and its development projects. It was only through high-handed manoeuvres that the clans could be marginalized politically and the HYK be reconstituted into a compliant broker for the state.

During the Second World War, a village representative system was established under Japanese rule. The New Territories were divided into smaller sub-districts. Leaders were chosen (usually from village elders) in each sub-district to "deal with the authorities and their own people, to meet the potential threat to themselves arising from misdemeanours, crime and anti-Japanese activity" (Hayes 1984:60). Facing the difficult situation after the war, the returned British inherited this Japanese system. The whole New Territories were divided into 28 administrative areas and one Rural Committee was formed in each of them.[15] One or two village representatives were selected from each village to form the Committees.[16]

Rural Committees were the recognized mediators between agrarian communities and the government and were also the recognized representative of the New Territories people:

> The rural committees have as yet no statutory existence or powers, exercising only such functions as the district officer sees fit to delegate, in which some are more successful than others. Most of them, however, have already proved their usefulness not only as mouthpieces of public opinion, but also in the arbitration of local clan and family disputes and generally as a bridge between the administration and the people. (District Commissioner 1956:13)

These village representatives, with their monopolization of information from the outside world, soon displaced the village elders and seized power in the lineage.[17] Naturally, the unofficial HYK's limited status as villagers-administration mediator was threatened by these committees. The HYK quickly responded to this crisis by adopting a new constitution in April 1950, converting itself from an "autonomous voluntary association" into a "society of village representatives" (Lee 1984:171). The reformed HYK accepted as members only village representatives, serving directors and deputy executives in towns and villages. The new constitution also divided the whole New Territories into seven election districts, each producing a definite number of executive councillors of the HYK. In this way, the HYK successfully increased its influence from the northern New Territories to the whole New Territories and made itself essentially an assembly of Rural Committees.

By then, the government could no longer afford to ignore the HYK's opinions. The HYK had become a more representative and stronger base of resistance against development plans as it was still under the control of the great clans. Before investigating how the government reconstituted the HYK and marginalized the great clans, let us first discuss how rural contradictions were shaped by the impulse of development in the 1950s.

The Tangs had had a tense relation with the colonizers since the land reform and tax reform at the turn of the century. Their hostility towards government was not only the result of past resentment but was fueled by new contradictions arising from the postwar years. The expansion of the urban area brought develop-

ment projects to relatively accessible areas in the New Territories, such as Tsuen Wan, Shatin, Tai Po and Tuen Mun, which had been at the periphery of the rural power structure. The leaders of the Rural Committees in these areas tapped many benefits from these projects because of their cordial relation with the colonial state.[18] They gradually emerged as a wealthy and powerful elite capable of challenging the political leadership of the great clans in the HYK. In contrast, grassroots villagers and tenants in the rapidly developing areas lost much and gained little. For them, development only meant undesirable resettlement and destruction of their livelihoods based on agriculture. This polarized the rural communities into a pro-development (or pro-government) camp made up of Rural Committees leaders from urbanizing areas and an anti-development (anti-government) camp based on the alliance of the great clans and members from the rural grassroots. Due to their respective geographical distribution, they were known alternatively as the "Tsuen Wan faction" (pro-development) and "Yuen Long faction" (anti-development). According to a secret official document, the former was led by Ho Chuen-yiu, Chan Yat-san and Cheung Yan-lung, while the latter by leaders of the Tang and Pang clans, for example, Tang Tak-yuk and Tang Hoi-yip.[19] The struggle between the two camps, alongside with their alliance or conflicts with the government, were the focus of political dynamics in the HYK over the decades.

The early phrase of government-led development in the 1950s confronted strong resistance from the villagers. Any resumption of land and demolition of building structure would easily trigger off local mobilization. For an example, when the colonial administration tried to demolish some temporary structures on a piece of the Tangs' tong (堂) land in Yuen Long in June 1957, the clan reacted by mobilizing 2,000 villagers to demonstrate against the demolition. Violent confrontation was prevented only by a concession from the government granting the building of permanent structures on the same spot (Kuan and Lau 1979:21). Sometimes, rural oppositions were not confined to the local level. The construction of the Tai Lam Chung Reservoir was the biggest project

in the decade, involving the resettlement of a cluster of villages. The building of an extensive catchwater system affected the water supply for paddy fields in a large area in the vicinity. The villagers affected refused to be sacrificed under the plan; negotiations for cash compensation or land exchange broke down, and many villagers just refused to move. The construction project was delayed for years, and the issue rose to the political level when the HYK dominated by the anti-development camp stood decisively on the villagers' side against the project, even at a time when the faction was beginning to be challenged:

> At Tai Lam the dam itself was finished before the start of the year under report, but a great deal of work remained to be done on the extensive northern catchwater system which is to supply one third of the water this reservoir can hold. There was considerable opposition to the construction of these catchwaters based primarily on genuine fears by farmers that they would lose their irrigation water but in addition *stirred up by mischievous people* for their own ends. (District Commissioner 1959:10; emphasis added)

Frequent protests against development projects eventually moved the colonial government to destroy the political influence of these "mischievous people" and reconstitute HYK into a complying institution. The opportunity came in the late 1950s when the internal struggle between the two camps intensified. From the mid-1950s onwards, the control of the HYK changed hands several times between the "Yuen Long faction" and the "Tsuen Wan faction" due to manoeuvres by each side. Though the "Yuen Long faction" had always had control of the HYK, a new constitution was passed in 1955 reshuffling the distribution of executive councillors from each of the seven election districts. Under the new rule, the number of councillors produced were determined by the population size of each district.[20] Besides, the chairman of each Rural Committee, who had benefitted most from development projects, was assigned an *ex-officio* status. The power of the pro-development camp redoubled, and it was not surprising to find that Ho Chuen-yiu, chairman of Tsuen Wan Rural Committee,

was elected the chairman of the HYK. Power changes were often accompanied by a radically different approach to government developmental policies. For example, a general assembly on 18 May 1956 resolved that the grassroots villagers would petition the Governor should he not accept the HYK's calling for an abandonment of current land policies restricting private conversions of rural land use. Yet, the petition was stalled by Ho, thereby nullifying a mobilization against the government.

The anti-development camp soon fought back. In an executive council meeting on 28 February 1957, "Yuen Long faction" managed somehow to revise the constitution again.[21] The new constitution would certainly expel the "pro-development" faction from leading positions in the election of the thirteenth term of office to be held in mid-1957. This rewriting of the constitution was regarded by Lee (1984:173) as a *coup d'état*. The "Tsuen Wan faction" reacted by secretly persuading the heads of Rural Committees to boycott the election and gained the support of 21 out of 28 of them. The anti-development camp soon appealed directly to the rank-and-file village representatives who formed the electoral college. Most village representatives overruled their committee chairmen and supported the election. This was the case even in some bases of the "Tsuen Wan faction," such as Tai Po and Tuen Mun.

When the HYK's internal struggle intensified, the District Commissioner, K.M.A. Barnett, seized the opportunity and started secret talks with the pro-development camp. A plan was discussed of founding a new pro-government institution called the Council for Rural Administration so as to marginalize the anti-development camp. Then, in June 1957, a letter was issued from the government to the HYK urging it to be registered under the new Societies' Ordinance (Amendment) 1957 or else the HYK would become illegal. An extraordinary meeting of the executive council was held in July to discuss the letter. The meeting was dominated by anti-government voices, and it decided in a defiant mood against registration. Available information does not allow us to ascertain whether the registration requirement was deliberately used by the colonial state against the HYK, but it did provide the legal basis for it to dissolve the HYK at any time.

On the eve of the election in August, the government finally declared the HYK illegal. According to the District Commissioner:

> The government was concerned about some recent activities undertaken by certain people in the name of the Heung Yee Kuk. In view of the development of the events, the government has concluded that the Kuk has lost its value of representation and therefore should be disqualified from recognition. (quoted by Kuan and Lau 1979:24)

Chaos followed. The organization of the Council for Rural Administration was under way, demonstration, lawsuits were initiated by the "Yuen Long faction" against the state under the rubrics of the "Kuk Protection Committee" headed by Cheung Tai-wing and Tang Hoi-yip, and lobbying by the government and the two opponent groups were frequent.[22] On 25 November, the government eventually introduced the Heung Yee Kuk Bill which was passed in the Legislative Council without discussion. In moving the first reading of the bill, the Colonial Secretary said:

> The immediate occasion for the introduction of this Bill arises from a dispute, or conflict, which has virtually prevented the Kuk from functioning at all during the last two years. This unhappy state of affairs began as a dispute between two factions within the Kuk which led in late 1957 to the withdrawal of the Government of recognition of the representative status of the Kuk. Matters finally developed into a dispute between one of these two factions on the one hand and the Government on the other. *The point at issue was a very simple one: those who had by then assumed control of the Kuk maintained that the Government ought to treat that body as being authoritatively representative of New Territories opinion but should at the same time in no way concern itself with the question how the Kuk officials were elected — that is to say, with the Kuk's constitution — or with the question whether the Kuk was truly representative.* (emphasis added)[23]

Essentially, the government's point was that it had to be satisfied with the composition of the HYK before it could be recognized as the representative of rural opinions. Under the bill, the essence of the 1955 constitution was restored, and pro-government elements

were strengthened. Chairmen of Rural Committee regained the *ex-officio* status, and the electoral college was constituted by 28 chairmen again. The Justices of the Peace appointed by the Governor were assigned *ex-officio* statuses too. The "Tsuen Wan faction" led their supporters to register the HYK under this ordinance on 11 December 1959, making it a statutory organization. Lying in front of the anti-government forces were two choices. They could either boycott the reconstituted HYK and risk losing any influence over it or join it to exert as much influence as possible. They chose the latter. The election of councillors was staged in 1960, and not surprisingly the pro-development faction won decisively.

From then on, the chairmanship of the HYK has been held by leaders of the "Tsuen Wan faction" with few exceptions. Oppositions to the government could still be heard occasionally, especially from members of the old Yuen Long faction. In particular, Tang Tak-yuk, who retained his membership in the HYK after the reorganization and had been described by the government as "a trouble maker," formed an "Anti-New Territories Land Policy Sub-Committee" within the HYK in 1960 to oppose the restrictions on the conversion of agricultural lands for building purposes.[24] In 1962, the government also reported that there was a left-wing faction within the HYK, under the leadership of Kan Chung-hing (an ex-member of the left-wing Society of Plantations which had been dissolved by the government in 1959), which intended on developing friendly relations with other left-wing organizations.[25] These isolated dissenting voices notwithstanding, the HYK was very cooperative with the state and the District Commissioner in particular. HYK's councillors and the Commissioner held regular meetings, exchanging views on development plans, land resumption, compensation schemes and land policies. Chan Yat-san, Chairman of HYK in the 1970s from the "Tsuen Wan faction," summarized the HYK's responsibility in a speech:

> It is the responsibility of the N. T. Heung Yee Kuk to protect the right of the N. T. people and their property. It is also its responsibility to ensure social harmony, political stability and economic prosperity in the N. T. Any councillor of the Kuk has the right to criticise the government on its mistakes and unfair measures but such criticism must be followed by constructive suggestions and a clear analysis of facts, and in the public interest. (Chan 1981)

As Chun (1987) noticed, after the 1950s voices of opposition to development projects were not heard in the HYK any more. What was most prominent instead were negotiations for material compensations.

In this way, the colonizers successfully ruled out the danger of the HYK becoming a territory-wide base of resistance and cleared the way for more intensive development in the New Territories. Opposition to land resumption for development from villagers was then confined to specific local areas and was prevented from spilling over into the political area as the opposition to Tai Lam Chun reservoir had done. The local elite in the Rural Committees was backed up by the colonial state, and it monopolized access to political power. It had become virtually loyal helpers of the government facilitating land resumption and preventing rural protests. From the available historical evidence, we cannot agree with Kuan and Lau's characterization of the process as the "resuscitation" or "revival" of a declining rural leadership and institution. The divisions between the two camps were not between a stubborn conservative group waning in influence and legitimacy and a rising modernizing group. Both groups represented concrete material interests and communal bases. The government intervened steadfastly on the side of the pro-development group, a choice which was by no means an innocent "resuscitation." It was *realpolitik*, pure and simple.

Intervention into Agriculture

The outlook for the agrarian economy in the New Territories changed radically in the postwar years as a result of the surge in immigration. It is now common knowledge that most Chinese immigrants went to the urban area, but it is rarely noted that many of the refugees, once crossing the border, chose to stay in the

New Territories and rented land from Hakka or *punti* landlords to become tenant farmers. The land which they rented was the fields left behind from outward migration by the original inhabitants to overseas and the city in the early postwar years. The origin of the immigrants was diverse. They might be urbanite, rice cultivators or vegetable farmers in the mainland (Aijmer 1973, 1975; Strauch 1984). As vegetable growing became highly profitable with government support, most of these newcomers converted the rented paddy fields of the original inhabitants into vegetable gardens. They were regarded as the "immigrant farmers" of the New Territories whose significance was always overlooked.

If any development project posed a threat to rural livelihood, the new immigrant farmers would certainly be the most miserable victims. They were excluded altogether from the hierarchy of the rural administration and representation system. Land resumption for them just meant an end to their agricultural production and residence, usually receiving little or no compensation in the process. While protests from original inhabitant villagers were alleviated through the HYK-Rural Committees-village representative hierarchy, the relatively small number of large-scale resistance from these rural underdogs, the immigrants, was puzzling. This could perhaps be accounted for by examining state interventions into these immigrant communities through the regulation of vegetable production. State intervention not only affected the livelihood of the immigrant farmers but also transformed the socio-economic structure of traditional villages, making the original inhabitants less reluctant to give up their land for development.

The government's postwar agricultural policy was to encourage the shifting from rice to vegetable production. An Agriculture Department was founded soon after the war.[26] Its mission was clearly stated:

> Prior to the war it was estimated that approximately one-fifth only of the vegetables consumed in the cities of Kowloon and Hong Kong was grown in the Territories. It has been the primary object of the Agriculture Department to increase this fraction very considerably. (*Hong Kong Annual Report 1947*:49)

While this policy was largely economically motivated, the political background cannot be ignored.[27] Potter has listed three factors contributing to the shift to vegetable production. In addition to the influx of immigrant farmers, are the following:

> Another factor was that the mainland was more isolated economically from the colony in the years after 1949, and this increased the need for the farmers of the New Territories to supply food for the expanding urban population. A third factor was the creation by the government of two marketing organizations [they will be mentioned later] that were designed to bring about the self-sufficiency of the colony in foodstuffs by encouraging vegetable production. (1968:59)

Potter even quotes an unpublished manuscript by a certain Chinese missionary, Mr Wong, living in prewar Yuen Long, to show the government's encouragement of vegetable growing back in the 1920s:

> Wong also mentions that in 1925 the government began to encourage the New Territories' farmers to grow vegetables. This government program grew out of a strike by the Hong Kong workers in 1925, which prevented the importation of vegetables and other foodstuffs from the mainland. According to Wong, the government, realizing that it was risky to depend solely on the mainland for essential foodstuffs, tried to make the colony more self-sufficient. (1968:37)[28]

Of course, the Colony, with scarce fertile farmland, could never achieve real self-sufficiency. The colonizers' concern was to minimize dependence on mainland China, especially in the turbulent postwar years and after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In fact, since the early twentieth century, rice consumed by the expanding urban population was imported from Indo-China, Burma and Thailand (*Hong Kong Annual Report 1947*:47). On the contrary, vegetables and marine products were solely imported from China. The state's encouragement of local vegetable production was natural, if seen in this light. Eventually, the shifting of cultivation pattern had boosted the share of local

vegetable production for local consumption from a negligible amount in the early twentieth century to nearly 50% in 1971 (Schiffer 1991:185).[29] The importance of this rising local production was seen clearly during the disturbances in 1967, which will be discussed later.

The government intervened into the agrarian economy first by establishing a monopoly over the wholesaling of vegetable products in the Colony. The Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO) was formed in 1946. It was originally established under the Defence Ordinance, and later reconstituted under a VMO Ordinance in 1952. All vegetables produced in the New Territories or imported into Hong Kong were collected by the VMO's collecting points and then transported to the urban wholesale markets. The ordinance gave exclusive right to the VMO to transport vegetables in the Colony (*Hong Kong Annual Report 1956*:124). The police were empowered to stop all lorries carrying vegetables without a permit issued by the VMO.

In the 1950s, local vegetable marketing cooperatives were also organized extensively under the supervision of the Agriculture Department. Members and non-members were allowed to submit their vegetables to these local organizations, and a 10% commission was charged for the operating cost. Low interest credit and cheap fertilizers (nightsoil) were the principal benefits of membership.[30] While the reception by the immigrant farmers of the cooperatives was by no means uniform, by 1962, over 76% of locally grown vegetables were handled through the cooperatives in contrast to 35% in 1952 (*Hong Kong Annual Report 1963*:118; *1952*:68). The presence of "middlemen" in vegetable marketing and self-organized marketing associations among the farmers was gradually washed out (Topley 1964:180-81). In addition, the VMO kept the importation from China at a low level so as to create a large demand for local products inducing the expansion of vegetable production.

Mobilizing Structures in Rural Communities

After the establishment of marketing cooperatives, a variety of cooperatives and voluntary associations were organized under state sponsorship one after the other. They included Pig-Raising Societies, Irrigation Societies, Co-operative Building Societies, Fish Pond Societies and Credit and Consumers' Societies, etc., in each village. These societies performed a wide range of functions: sums of money were delivered to farmers after a bad harvest; loans were given for the establishment of new vegetable farms or pig-raising enterprises; manpower was organized for small-scale public works from building a footpath to improving irrigation systems; experts were sent to the villages introducing new technology in agricultural production and providing technical advice; production competitions were held to stimulate agricultural production; money was raised for collective entertainment within the immigrant communities.

Cooperatives supervised by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department therefore became an important part of the immigrant farmers' lives who were excluded from the village life of the original inhabitants.[31] After the Second World War, then, a network of state-sponsored secondary organizations permeated the rural communities. It is therefore incorrect to say that the New Territories had become an atomized society due to socio-economic modernization. Communal solidarities might have been weakened, but the important point is that the spate of state-sponsored modern associations had attempted to fill the gap in village life.

The organizations played a certain role in the formation of group identities among the immigrant farmers. Based on fieldworks in So Kwun Wat, Chau and Lau noted that the election of the directors of the local cooperative was an important affair in the farmers' community live. Although the cooperative was not exclusive to immigrant farmers, it did facilitate the emergence of immigrant leaders and the formation of a Farming Association representing immigrants' interests in the village. As most func-

tions of the cooperatives depended on the resources from the Agricultural and Fisheries Department, the leaders usually maintained a good relationship with the government. Their legitimacy over the constituents was more or less derived from this cordial relation. We will further discuss this point in the cases later.

Of course, government-sponsored societies were not the unique and always dominant form of communal identity and solidarity. Migdal (1974) suggests that farmers' communities in contemporary Third World were usually a contested terrain for different socio-political forces, such as nation state, left-wing parties and local interest groups, inside and outside the communities. As mentioned above, even the HYK had leftist elements during the 1960s. Aijmer (1980; 1986) also finds in Shatin that the immigrant farmers there did not form a homogeneous community. Different logics of communal identity and solidarity criss-crossed each other. Farmers of the same geographic origins tended to cluster and joined respective landsman associations. More importantly, PRC-affiliated left-wing organizations and *Kuomingtang*-inclined organizations were present in the rural areas as well. Farmers were often divided in their political affiliations to either the Nationalists or the Communists. Aijmer discovers that it was common for immigrant farmers to hold a hostile attitude towards the colonial authority which was thought to take much from but give too little to the Chinese. Their perceived legitimacy of the colonial state was weak, making left-wing activists influential.[32] The latter were so dominant that the leadership of the local marketing cooperative studied by Aijmer was monopolized by the leftists. In 1967, farmers were also mobilized by the cooperative leaders to protest against the authority's act of suppressing urban demonstrators.

Though the existence of left-wing influence was not restricted to Shatin, it is wrong to exaggerate its influence.[33] Rural leftists were scattered in a few communities and were not much organized into a unified political force (except in 1967). They might be strong in some specific localities but were negligible at the level of the entire New Territories. Maybe it was caused by the weakness

of territory-wide rural leftist organizations. A Hong Kong and Kowloon Chinese Farming and Agriculture Association was founded under strong left-wing leadership after the war to intervene into local disputes between immigrant tenants and indigenous landowners. Nevertheless, the organization was shortlived and dissolved by the colonial regime in the early 1950s because of the political dangers posed by it (Aijmer 1986:244-45; District Commissioner 1951:6).[34]

The overall weakness of left-wing forces and the dominance of government influence in the rural immigrant communities were exposed in 1967, when a series of strikes and riots broke out in the urban area. To prevent urban unrest from spreading into the New Territories, People Security Units were formed by local residents in all 28 administrative districts under the encouragement of the District Office after June. Local cooperatives and Rural Committees formed the backbone of these units. The first principle of these Security Units was to "support government's effort in keeping local public order" (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 25 June 1967). They organized small teams to patrol the areas. Suspected leftists were apprehended and taken to the police. The units also conveyed government's messages and "correct information" back to the grassroots communities through Village Representatives and cooperatives.

When the leftists called for a boycott of food markets and the Chinese government briefly stopped transporting agricultural products into the Colony, the authority reacted by rallying direct support from vegetable and pig-raising cooperatives. The response of the cooperatives was gratifying from the government's point of view. Their leaders sent letters to the authority promising they would try their best to guarantee the food supply (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 30 June 1967). The cooperatives redoubled their efforts in collecting agricultural products from their members. They seemed to have successfully forestalled any effort by the leftists to disrupt the vegetable supply in the New Territories. The head of the Agriculture Department summoned the cooperatives' heads again on 28 July to express his gratitude:

> Today I invite you all to express my special thanks. In the recent turbulent months, you have given great support to the government personally or on behalf of agricultural organizations. And you all have protected the peace and stability by concrete actions.... It is a fact that Hong Kong is not capable of producing all the necessary foodstuffs. But it is also a fact that Hong Kong has to maintain a strong and reliable agricultural sector to cope with any challenges from incidents when importation of outside products is disrupted. I am much confident in you agricultural leaders to continue shouldering this important responsibility in the coming days. (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 29 July 1967)[35]

It is beyond doubt that the agricultural cooperatives were important stabilizing forces among the tenants communities in the eyes of the colonial state. Only after 1967 did left-wing forces begin to step up their mobilizational efforts in the New Territories. We will return to this later.

Socio-Economic Changes and Their Significance

Meanwhile, the socio-economic structure of Hakka and *punti* villages was remolded by this "vegetable revolution."[36] The "land reform" in the early twentieth century had brought a decentralized land ownership based on rice cultivation. Many Hakka villagers benefited from the reform and were transformed from tenant farmers into owner cultivators farming their own lands. Over 70% of land was used for rice growing and the rest was planted with sweet potatoes, ground-nuts, sugar-cane and different kinds of fruit (*Hong Kong Annual Report 1938*:51). Vegetable gardening was nearly non-existent. Rice cultivation buttressed the wealth of the Tang clans as they occupied the best land for growing rice. It was especially so when international trade enabled the Yuen Long cultivators (the Tangs) to export their products to the USA, and consumed cheaper, low quality rice imported from the Southeast Asia. The cash surplus generated by these transactions was considerable. In contrast, cultivators (the Hakkas) of the marginal lands in the New Territories, such as those in Tsuen Wan

and Shatin, could only grow rice for their self-subsistence. When cash became more and more important with the imposition of taxes payable in cash and the expansion of a cash economy in general, the Hakka villagers could only make their ends meet by sending their sons to work in the city or as seamen.

The situation changed abruptly after the immigrants began to rent land for vegetable gardening after the war. With the strong technical, financial and organizational support from the colonial state, vegetable growing became a profitable business and attracted an increasing number of immigrants and villagers.[37] Aijmer finds the income of vegetable farmers was always higher than many waged labourers in the city (1980:61; 1975:564). It is consistent with his finding that many of the tenant vegetable farmers were originally urban workers (or even petty merchants) in Hong Kong, and in the early postwar period economic difficulties in the urban area sometimes drove urban dwellers to settle in the New Territories (Aijmer 1973).

The wider the "vegetable revolution" spread, the less advantage could the great clans get from their privileges of occupying the best lands. Vegetable growing is intensive and requires a large amount of fertilizers. A small piece of land can produce a high yield within the labour power of a farming household. Also, the fertility of soils does not matter very much as the soil can easily be made adaptable to the crops grown. The most important thing is that vegetable farm yields five to eight crops a year in contrast to one to two crops for paddy fields (see Grant 1962). These meant the hilly, infertile lands of Hakka villagers were equally capable of yielding good crops and generating fast returns. The spread of cash crops growing displaced any remnants of self-subsistence economy in New Territories. The poor villagers in Shatin, Sheung Shui, Tsuen Wan, etc., welcomed the immigrant farmers and rented land to them. The wealth of these villages quickly outgrew that of the great clans. Baker observed a paradoxical phenomenon in the New Territories that the poorer and weaker the village in pre-colonial times, the faster the modern and beautiful village house first appeared (Baker 1966).

By the 1960s, land for rice cultivation had decreased to a very small proportion of cultivable lands. Census data in 1961 showed 66% of vegetable farmers renting land from others (Census Commissioner 1962:Table 408). The rest of them was mostly Hakka villagers who converted their rice fields into vegetable gardens. But, the adoption of vegetable growing was by no means popular among the original inhabitants. Traditionally, vegetable growers had had very low status in relation to rice farmers and had been looked down upon by the latter (Topley 1964:171). So, the New Territories villagers, especially the *punti*, were quite reluctant to transform themselves into vegetable farmers. In fact, renting farmland to immigrant tenants gave them a steady stream of income, sometimes exceeding that from cultivating rice themselves. It also enabled them to free themselves from the land and engage into other business. As Topley observes:

> In areas with land suitable for vegetable growing many farmers rent their land and appear to try to live on income from rent, perhaps supplementing this income with the cash earnings from a son in the town. Tea-houses in one market town near a vegetable area can be seen crowded with such small landlords sitting about chatting for hours of the day. (1964:167)

The percentage of tenant farmers increased after the Census in 1961 as more original inhabitants left the agricultural economy and the ranks of middle peasants. Chun (1985) thinks that in the pre-colonial New Territories "land is to live." Yet, after the "great transformation" and the intrusion of the market economy, the value of land was reduced to its exchange value and now "land is to exchange." He argues that the "great transformation" was mainly brought about by the establishment of private ownership of land in the early twentieth century. In fact, the process lasted a much longer time and continued into the "vegetable revolution" in the 1950s and 1960s. Anyway, a "modern" land economy was constituted by the active intervention of the colonial state, and resumption of land no longer meant an end to the livelihood of the petty landlords who had detached themselves from agricultural

production after the drastic socio-economic change in the early postwar decades.

In a nutshell, postwar state intervention into agricultural production had two political consequences. First, by building pro-government organizations, it prevented the communities of immigrant tenants from becoming breeding grounds for oppositional forces, such as left-wing activism. The state successfully gave itself an important role in the lives of immigrant communities through direct administrative actions and the establishment of voluntary associations. Secondly, the conversion of Hakka villagers from middle peasants into small landlords as a result of the "vegetable revolution" made them less resistant to land resumption with compensation. Kuan and Lau's analysis misses the significance of both of these processes, as they consider the state as largely alien to and outside of rural communities. The postwar development of the New Territories in fact testifies to the enduring significance of actions by the colonial state in shaping the socio-economic modernization of the New Territories. It was far from an autonomous and natural process, the colonial state was at the core of "modernization" process, actively preventing conflicts and resistance from getting out of hand.

Explaining the Sporadic Rural Resistance: Case Studies

We have seen how the colonial state extended its administrative and regulative apparatus into the rural communities of original inhabitants and immigrant farmers. In so doing, the state actively engineered social and political stability. Drawing on archival materials and existing ethnographic studies, here we will examine briefly some cases of rural resistance against development to show how they were shaped by state intervention and the structure of political opportunities. They also help to put the alleged "stability" of the rural communities into proper perspective. The

New Territories were never short of conflicts; only that these conflicts were often contained in specific localities.

Opposition and Pacification in a Hakka Village

On a stormy summer day in Tseng Lan Shue, a Hakka village in Sai Kung in 1973, an old village house collapsed. Several days later, a team of Building Department officers went into the village. After a series of examinations, the officers classified five village houses, including the ancestral hall, as dangerous buildings that had to be demolished. The government also proposed moving the residents into a public housing estate. This provoked the villagers, and a village assembly was gathered spontaneously on 18 August. The villagers claimed that the job of the Building Department was to regulate urban buildings and did not have the right of intervention in the New Territories. The village houses, for hundreds of years, had been built with special materials and had structures different from urban buildings. They would protect the houses by all means. In the assembly, several villagers were chosen to deal with the government on the issue. The village was filled with fervent sentiment (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 19 August 1973).

Yau Kee, the Village Representative of Tseng Lan Shue and Chairman of the Rural Committee in the area, then emerged to take over the villagers' spontaneous action. The issue was discussed in the Rural Committee in an emergency meeting three days later. A concern group headed by Yau was formed to replace the representatives selected in the spontaneous village assembly. Yau tried to tone down the opposition, just placing the blame on the Building Department for not notifying the Village Representative before classifying the houses as dangerous buildings. Peaceful negotiations between the concern group and government officials were held, and petition letters were sent. Yet, these mild actions did little to change the government's decision. The only concession was a promise not to demolish the ancestral hall (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 22-29 August 1973).

On 10 September, officials went into the village to post sealing orders onto the houses to be demolished. Hundreds of villagers gathered spontaneously to block the village; the officials failed to accomplish their task. On 14 September, the officials went into the village with sealing orders again. This time they were accompanied by a team of the police tactical unit. Villagers resisted their entry again and fought the police with sticks, nightsoil and urine. The situation was quickly put under control by the police. The orders were posted, and one villager was arrested. Chairman Yau preferred to keep silent over the incident. The arrested man was taken to court on 15 September. A crowd of villagers went to hear the court, and, after that, they went to the Sai Kung District Office to request a meeting with the District Officer. They had an argument with the officials but dispersed afterwards (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 11-16 September 1973). It was the last report on this case.

We are not sure what Chairman Yau did to forestall the villagers' further mobilization. But, we are quite certain that Yau held a very negative attitude towards the reactive villagers; he interpreted the clashes as being caused by "non-constructive sentiments of some villagers stimulated by the District Office's inappropriate handling of the issue" (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 19 September 1973). Yau tried all means to keep himself "clean" from the clashes and prevent his good relation with the government from being damaged by the event. On 15 September, he invited the Sai Kung District Officer and the Head of Police in the district to a banquet. During the meal, he expressed his sincerity in cooperating with the government in developing Sai Kung and stated that the recent "unpleasant events" had only been caused by misunderstanding between officials and villagers. He emphasized that these conflicts could have been prevented if the officials had notified and consulted beforehand the Village Representatives and the Chairman of the Rural Committee.

The importance of the demolition of these five small buildings was marked by the high-handed manner and uncompromising attitude of the government. The event offered an example of how officials attempted to regulate village buildings, demolish them

and resettle the villagers. Such actions were one of the administrative weapons facilitating development projects and land resumption processes. The case also shows the contradiction between the state-sponsored elite and grassroots villagers. The latter would defend their property and livelihood without hesitation when they were threatened, while the former were more concerned with their good relation with the government. Discharging their role as honest brokers between the state and the villagers, these representatives often pre-empted the mobilizational efforts of angry villagers. We actually believe that Kuan and Lau have underestimated the importance of the coopted elite in maintaining rural stability. They seem to think that, as they were the only politically active stratum in the villages, their absorption into administrative structures would be enough to keep the stability. Here, our analysis points to a far more active role being played by the elite in dissipating rural conflicts against the far from politically inapt and disorganized masses.

Local Agricultural Organizations and Land Resumption: The Case of So Kwun Wat

So Kwun Wat village was a Hakka village between Tsuen Wan and Tuen Mun. Since the 1950s, an increasing number of immigrants had moved into the village and become tenant farmers of the Hakka landlords. Chau and Lau (1982) have documented the formation of community identity and leaders among the farmers under the mediation of the colonial state.

The immigrants had to rely on the Hakka Village Representative for getting permits to build temporary squatter housing and solving other issues related to outsiders. Yet, they had no right to vote for the Representative. This one-sided reliance deepened their inferior status in So Kwun Wat.

The situation changed when a vegetable cooperative society was founded in 1957. Vegetable growers, including immigrant farmers and Hakka villagers still engaged in agriculture, depended much on the cooperative for financial support and technical assistance. The cooperative expanded quickly, and, by the early 1960s, its membership had grown to 210, of which the majority was immigrant tenants. Needless to say, the leadership was always controlled by the immigrants. The cooperative soon became a quasi-representative organization of the immigrant communities and facilitated the emergence of local leaders among them. In 1970, leaders in the tenant community formed a So Kwun Wat Farming Association joined exclusively by the immigrants. The heads of the association also had good relation with officials in the Agriculture Department and District Offices.

The services offered by the association included the transportation of farmers' products to the vegetable market, the operation of a clinic and a kindergarten, the organization of tours to foreign cities, the provision of relief to the families of deceased members, the arrangement of funeral services, and assisting the Agriculture and Fisheries Department in the administration of government services. The association was a spin-off from the cooperative, and its function was nearly identical to it. The only meaningful difference was that the association was an exclusive organization for the immigrants and was hence their legitimate representative in dealing with the Hakka original inhabitants as well as outsiders. It played an important role in enhancing the collective identity and solidarity among the immigrant tenant farmers.

In the mid-1970s, the government began to appropriate large amount of land from So Kwun Wat for the construction of a highway. Negotiations between District Officers and the Village Representative began. The immigrant farmers responded to the resumption by urging leaders of the Farming Association to hold similar negotiation with the government as they had good relation with the officials. The association did so, and its status of representing immigrants' opinion was recognized by the District Office. Bargaining between the association and the District Office conveyed the voices of tenant farmers along administrative channels acceptable and manageable by the rulers. It had prevented an outbreak of resistance and confrontation among the powerless farmers.

Chau and Lau explain the peaceful resolution of the issue[38] in terms of the "administrative absorption of conflicts" as the government kept the situation under control by granting official representative status to the would-be-confrontational leaders of the association. Nevertheless, what they have mistaken is that the government had not just "absorbed" and "recognized" spontaneously emerging leaders in preventing rural mobilization. It had been in fact involved actively in the emergence of these leaders and had molded the organizational structure in the rural communities over the decades by its agricultural policy and sponsorship of local organizations.

Leftist Mobilization against the Landlords in Fung Yuen

Strauch has recorded the impact of development on Fung Yuen, a Hakka village in eastern Tai Po, based on his field work there. It was similar to So Kwun Wat in the sense that most of the Hakka villagers there had rented their land to immigrants for growing vegetables. Nevertheless, there the immigrant tenants' reaction to development was less peaceful.

In Fung Yuen, the government-sponsored organization faced keen competition from a leftist organization in forging a collective identity among the tenant farmers. As mentioned, after 1967, the left-wing agricultural trade union enjoyed a healthy growth in the New Territories, serving as an alternative source of collective identity for the farmers:

> [S]ome of the tenant farmers appeared in 1978 to be developing a nascent class identity that linked them with others beyond Fung Yuen. This was actively encouraged by a leftist ("patriotic") trade union based on Tai Po (Nung-muk chik-kung-ooi), and more inadvertently fostered by the government-organized marketing cooperative. The cooperative is essentially a single-purpose organization; its members enjoy the convenience of having their vegetables picked up locally.... Nonetheless, the daily gatherings at the pick-up point facilitate social mingling as well as communication of a more focused nature, when there is something to be communicated. The leftist union has a farmers' branch which actively recruits in Fung Yuen; membership in 1978 was growing, and included a few of the villagers who farm their own land. The union sponsored a "six villages association", encompassing several neighbouring villages as well as Fung Yuen, which organizes three communal banquets each year.... Most of the informal leaders among the Fung Yuen tenant farmers are union members. (Strauch 1984:198)

As intensive development was coming to Tai Po, landlords in Fung Yuen were expecting the rising value of their lands and were eager to discard the tenant farmers on it. Landlords' attempts were resisted by the tenants who were helped by the leftist union. In 1978, a land dispute between a landlord, Cheung, and a tenant, Ip, triggered off a village-wide conflict between the original inhabitant and the immigrant community.

Strauch notes that, in spite of the land reform at the turn of the century which terminated legally the perpetual tenancy system, the system persisted in everyday tenant-landlord relations in the 1960s and 1970s. Even the immigrant farmers would have a moral expectation on their landowners. Expelling the tenants from their land for larger profits and for reasons other than self-use was regarded as immoral. It was also thought that the immigrant tenants had the right to transfer their land to other tenants without notifying the landlords on the condition that rents continued to be paid. This "moral economy" restricted the Hakka villagers from selling the land to outsiders for non-agricultural use and making big money. Landlords' increasing aspiration to sell the land and tenants' reluctance to move in the 1970s heightened tensions between the two parties.

Cheung was a Hakka landlord renting his land to Tse who was an immigrant farmer. Cheung lived in England and let his elder brother collect rents for him. With a declining health, Tse quitted farming in 1977 and transferred the land to immigrant Ip, receiving HK$20,000 as "transfer money." The transaction was witnessed by a number of tenant farmers. Tse died in 1978. Learning of his tenants' death, Cheung came back to the village to resume his land for development, but only to find it was occupied

by an unknown Ip. Cheung tried to expel Ip, but the latter refused to move. The dispute between the two parties escalated. Other landlords joined in to support Cheung while Ip was supported by other tenant farmers and the leftist union. A village-wide confrontation broke out, and conflicts between the camps were frequent in the following weeks. At last, Cheung, at the instigation of the village elders, broke into Ip's farmland and destroyed his standing crops there. The farmers got very angry and demanded a public meeting.

An open negotiation was later held with the attendance of village officers, Cheung with most landlords on his side, and Ip and the union activists backed up by the tenant farmers. The talk lasted for a week, and finally a compromise was achieved. Compensation was not given for the destroyed crops, but Cheung permitted Ip's continued use of land, rent-free, for one more year.

Conflicts between development-inclined landlords and farming tenants were not confined to Fung Yuen. Many students of rural communities in Hong Kong have documented such conflicts in various localities. For examples, Aijmer (1986:219-35) tells us that, though the Hakka landlords in Shatin tried to reconstitute the landlord-tenant relation through short-term contracts, the farmers still thought they had the right to unlimited tenancy and refused to move when forced by the villagers. These disputes often ended in bloody fighting. Potter (1968:117-22) also finds that when indigenous villagers reclaimed their land from the immigrants, they would face a request for compensation, the amount of which was always so high that they had to abandon their plan to sell the land.

Landlord-tenant conflicts in the New Territories might have been violent, but they rarely spread out to become large-scale mobilization. The disputes were always individualized and localized, at most extended to the village level (as the case of Fung Yuen illustrates). This helped to smoothen the land resumption process, for many of the potentially rebellious immigrant tenants had already been expelled by landlords one by one before the authority came to resume the land collectively. As discussed, after

a long process of commercialization in the New Territories and changes in landownership system, the landlords, though probably not the tenants, were quite receptive to the idea of land as commodity. They were quite ready to part with their land and reap the profits. In fact, there had been numerous individual attempts to prepare for the land resumption, ranging from evicting tenants, replacing permanent with fixed-term tenancy, leaving land fallow rather than renting it out. In other words, the contradiction between planned development and farmers' interest was scattered into individualized contradictions between landowners and tenant farmers. It was only possible under the decentralized landownership system in the New Territories installed by the colonization process and facilitated by the socio-economic transformation in the postwar years.

The uneven pace of development and land resumption process in the New Territories also contributed to preventing the potentially rebellious immigrant communities from becoming a real territory-wide threat to the colonial rule. The demolition of rural squatter housing built by immigrants and the collective resumption of agricultural lands were frequent in the New Territories, but land resumption always affected only a few villages at any one time. In the words of James Hayes, a former senior civil servant responsible for New Territories affairs:

> The government's development programmes had proceeded in phases, and the old settlements were usually tackled one by one, making it harder to organize, and justify, any intervention. (1996:95)

That is why we could only see, at most times, sporadic protests in different localities which rarely spilled over to cause overall instability in the Colony, no matter how violent these protests were.

A Negative Case: The Protest over Waste Disposal Regulation

The mechanism of Colony "stability" discussed above can be illustrated by a negative case: the territory-wide and prolonged

resistance against the Waste Disposal Bill since the mid-1980s. In this case, the organizational and political structure of the New Territories is radically different from the 1970s. After the urban expansion in the 1970s, most agricultural lands formerly farmed by immigrant farmers have been appropriated by development projects. Many farmers, however, have chosen not to migrate to the urban area and have started to raise pigs or chickens in very limited rural space left in the New Territories. But their livelihood as farmers was threatened again in the late 1980s when a Waste Disposal Regulation was implemented.

The Waste Disposal Regulation was first drafted in 1985. Under the Regulation, livestock raising in the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and parts of the New Territories would be forbidden. The remaining chicken and pig raisers in the New Territories would have to be placed under a very strict standard restricting waste disposal. Licenses were issued to farmers who were within the maximum level allowed. However, the licenses would be cancelled if the farmers were found disposing of waste at a level higher than the standard and a fine would be imposed.

The bill stirred up the farmers as it would destroy their livelihood. They also felt that the government should give them financial and technical assistance to upgrade their facilities in order to meet the standard. Farmers' organizations, including left-wing farmers' unions and pig-raising cooperatives, joined together to form an alliance called the Joint Conference of Agricultural Associations. The alliance was dominated by left-wing groups. It was understandable as the left-wing "patriotic" group expanded their power and influence in the immigrant communities over the 1970s. It was achieved through their active intervention into disputes arising from land resumption. With a rapidly declining agricultural population, the members of *Nung-muk chik-kung-ooi* (The Graziers Union) rose drastically from 3,639 in 1971 to 22,655 in 1981 (Registrar of Trade Unions 1972, 1982). It is also probable that the leaders of local cooperatives also gradually became aligned with left-wing organizations, since the cooperatives' reliance on the government had declined as the financial and technical support from the Agricultural and Fisheries Department had diminished.

The alliance took an uncompromising stand against the Regulation at the beginning, and threatened violent action if the bill was passed (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 26 February 1987). On 9 October 1987, a rally was organized and was joined by more than 2,000 farmers. In the rally, farmers spoke furiously against the Regulation, and a declaration was made: "We farmers will protect our livelihood with our own lives, we will live and die with our farms" (*Wen Wei Po* 9 October 1987). At the same occasion, the Chairman of the HYK, Lau Wong-fat, made a speech trying to pacify the farmers. He told the angry peasants not to resort to violent action. He said that only the principles of the Regulation would be passed in the coming Legislative Council (LegCo) meeting, but its details would be determined later by the government in consultation with the HYK. The HYK would reflect their views to the officials.

The farmers did not follow the advice of Chairman Lau. On 15 October, more than a thousand farmers gathered outside the LegCo building. They attempted to stop the LegCo meeting by rushing into the building and eventually clashed with the police. The farmers hassled the police for seven hours. One of them was injured on his head while another one was arrested. The bill passed almost unanimously, except for the opposition of a representative from the left-wing Federation of Trade Unions. After this, a consultation committee composed of farmers' organizations and the officials was formed to discuss details of the Regulation. But, the discussion in the meetings was not very amicable as the farmers' representatives walked out several times to protest against the officials' indifference to their interests.

In the following years, demonstrations were organized frequently outside government buildings. Each demonstration involved at least several hundred farmers, and clashes with the police were common. On 27 April 1994, about 1,000 farmers from all corners of the New Territories gathered at the LegCo building again when the Regulation was finalized. This time, the demonstrators were more prepared. Trucks of chickens and ducks were

set free onto the busy roads in Central to paralyse the traffic. The farmers armed themselves with nightsoil, wooden sticks and litter bins and assaulted the police who kept them away from the building (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 28 April 1994). Nevertheless, the farmers' action could not stop the legislators from passing the law, and the leader of the alliance claimed that they would continue with the opposition to the Regulation through radical action in spite of their temporary defeat.

This resistance movement is unprecedented in the Hong Kong's colonial history in terms of its persistence and scale of mobilization. The effect of across-the-board imposition of the Waste Disposal Regulation was vastly different from the uneven and intermittent process of land resumption. The case shows what would happen when the livelihood of immigrant farmers from different areas was simultaneously threatened and a common enemy was identified. It also illustrates how the organizational dynamics in the New Territories have changed. After the 1967 failure in instigating a urban riot, the organizational strength of left-wing organizations, symbolized by its trade union arm, increased dramatically in the rural area. It has apparently succeeded in capitalizing on the stock of grievances among the immigrant farmers and has organized them. Although space does not allow us to go further into this point, the overall political complex in the New Territories has also changed as the HYK and the rural elite have begun to dissociate themselves from the British colonial administration after the signing of the Sino-British Declaration. The rural elite, or at least a sizable number, has turned itself from a staunch supporter of the colonial administration into "vanguards" supporting the restoration of Chinese sovereignty and against British "conspiracies" over Hong Kong. This political realignment in the rural area is naturally conducive to protests against the colonial government.

Conclusion

Rural stability has only been relative in Hong Kong. The New Territories has been far from conflict-free, but has had many instances of localized and transient conflicts. The content of such conflicts tends to be "modern" rather than "traditional" among the original inhabitants, especially the village elite who are concerned more about concrete material interests rather than moral values after the state-instigated "great transformation." They were basically co-opted by the government. By cooperating with the state's developmental plans, they were rewarded with handsome benefits by selling their land or receiving compensation. The HYK acted as their mouthpiece in soliciting more favourable terms of compensation. On the side of the immigrant farmers, nevertheless, we do observe the effects of a "moral economy." The moral expectation of the tenants that the landowners would protect their tenancy rights always clashed with the latter's desire for compensation and profits from land sale. But, the tenants-landlords conflicts were individualized most of the time and rarely spread into region-wide or colony-wide conflicts. The organizations among immigrant farmers were not strong and coordinated enough to sustain a large-scale opposition to the government's planned development. Left-wing organizations had always had a urban bias, and only after the setback in 1967 did organizational efforts begin to be devoted to the rural area.

We agree with Kuan and Lau that a cash nexus of interest dispensation did exist between the government and the rural elite, but we think the latter's role, exemplified by the HYK, in the maintenance of rural stability has been misunderstood. On the one hand, the presence of the colonial state in the countryside was far from minimal before the planned development of the 1970s. It in fact exerted a continuous influence in the society and economy of the rural communities. Such interactions between the villagers and the government in fact "normalized" and "modernized" the relationship between the former and the latter. First, the colonial

state did not merely "resuscitate" the rural leaders, it actually reconstituted them into brokers of the colonial state according to its own political designs. The "coup" in the late 1950s purged the HYK of the anti-development group and put it firmly under the control of the pro-development camp. Secondly, after a series of extensive interventions into the agrarian communities, the colonial state did not appear to the villagers as an alien force threatening their traditional customs, but an institutional complex that had been shaping their lives for decades. By enforcing law and order in the countryside, maintaining a "modern" landholding system, and regulating the agrarian economy, the state also acquired a sense of legitimacy in the mind of the villagers to some extent. When conflicts between the state and the indigenous villagers appeared, they were not primordial ones with intense moral overtones, but a result of material conflicts which could be more or less pacified through negotiation and compensation. Thirdly, within the rural immigrant communities, the state preempted the growth of oppositional organizations among the tenant farmers by sponsoring the growth of a spate of voluntary associations and cooperatives in their communities and maintained cordial relationships with their leaders.

More importantly, rather than merely being "bought off" and not making any trouble themselves, the rural elites had a more active role to play than Kuan and Lau would allow for. The rural communities, even the immigrant ones, were not atomized ones without any capacity for mobilization. We have documented the emergence of both spontaneous protests among villagers and protests supported by left-wing organizations. It was often through the manoeuvres or repression of the coopted elite that the resistance became dissipated.

As Skocpol's (1979) study of the great agrarian revolutions points out, the outbreak of such social revolution is only possible under a stringent set of conditions. Unlike the modernization approach, it does not see traditionalistic protests as a natural reaction to the modernization and commercialization of the countryside. If this is the case, the question that guides Kuan and Lau's

study is somewhat misplaced. Instead of "why there had been few conflicts during planned development and modernization?," we really need to ask, "during planned development and modernization, what were the possible sources, if any, of conflict and in what forms did these conflicts become manifested?." This paper hopes to contribute, albeit in a preliminary way, to our understanding of the second question. A more comprehensive and adequate answer, of course, must await further historical and empirical studies of the New Territories.[39] In any case, our paper suggests that state action and its institutional presence, the relationship and shifting alliances between the state and the rural elite, and social differentiation within the villages must be taken as the core of such inquiries.

Notes

1. There are controversies over what was the power base of the Chinese gentry class. Some argue they were basically office holders of the imperial administration who used their status to buy land and increase their wealth (e.g. Chang 1955). Some think the gentry class was at first wealthy landlords. Their holding of offices were a result of their wealth (e.g. Kuhn 1970). Nevertheless, we are more inclined towards Skocpol's synthetic view that the Chinese gentry class in fact based its power both on its wealth, control of land and political/military backup from the imperial state (Skocpol 1979:71-72).
2. For "lineage" and "clan," we adopt the definition of Baker (1966). Lineage is a group of people having kinship relation and living together to form a village, while clan is a cluster of lineages.
3. According to Kamm (1977), the land ownership of Xinan was established by the claims of "first cultivator." That is, anybody who claimed to be the first cultivator of a piece of land would be regarded as the owner of it. Of course, it was difficult to identify the true "first cultivator," so the recognition of

land ownership relied actually on the arbitrary decision of the magistrates who usually had good relations with the Tangs.

4. According to Faure (1986:109-16), heroes who died in these resistance actions are still worshipped in temples of some Hakka villages, such as those in Lam Tsuen and Pat Heung.
5. In one case, Sheung Shui's Haus attempted to detach themselves from the protection of the Mans resulting in an all-round warfare. The Mans were defeated at last, and the Haus have ascended from being a dependent clan to a local big brother since then.
6. In a land survey by the colonizers upon their arrival in the New Territories, it was found that tenants always confused the tax with the rent paid to the landlords (Kamm 1977:80).
7. It was the situation in the nineteenth century when the population and wealth of the Hakka people increased drastically. Needless to say, the situation was worse before the century.
8. When the Haus and Lius struggled for the control of the Fanling area in the late nineteenth century, both parties competed to use their connections with the bureaucrats and persuaded them to send imperial troops against their enemies. The conflict ended with a peaceful compromise as neither of them was confident of winning the war (Baker 1966:40).
9. More and more of these villagers abandoned their infertile lands and moved to market towns and the newly established Victoria City, or were recruited as sailors. They earned cash through wage labour. Some other Hakkas engage themselves in the cash economy by selling portion of their rice to the increasingly prosperous towns and cities.
10. In the sense used by Polanyi (1957).
11. Groves (1969:42-43) notices that a rumour saying that all lands would be confiscated by the colonizers were spreading before the British takeover, making many villagers feel that it was necessary to join the resistance. Notices also were sent to villages to call for support by the Tangs. One of them wrote: "The English barbarians are about to enter our territory, and ruin will come upon our villages and hamlets. All we villagers must enthusiastically come forward to offer armed resistance and act in unison. When the drum sounds to the fight, we must all respond to the call for assistance. Should anyone hesitate to take part or hinder or obstruct out military plans he will most certainly be severely punished and no leniency will be shown. This is issued as a forewarning" (quoted in Groves 1969:51ff.).
12. An important point to note is, though the colonizers intended to ensure their revenue through land tax, they had decided to freeze the land tax for nearly 70 years in the early twentieth century in the face of the strong opposition from the villagers. Alternatively, the state's revenue was guaranteed by a land policy restricting private conversion of agricultural lands into housing lands. Under the policy, the government could resume agricultural land from the villagers at low money value, convert it into housing land, and then sell it out as housing land at high price. In this way, the state could earn a lot from the development of the rural areas started in the 1920s.
13. For a description of the work of District Officers, see Hayes (1996).
14. The colonial authority passed a law forbidding any possession of arms. It made it impossible for the Tangs to organize a resistance army again.
15. The first Rural Committee was formed in 1947. By 1958, all 28 Committees had been founded.
16. Sometime, the forming of the rural committee leaderships went violent. Two examples were the bloody warfare between different local powers competing to control respective committees in Cheung Chau and Shap Pat Heung. See District Commissioner (1955, 1961).
17. Sometime, the village representative and village elder were the same person, but most of the time they were not. The representative was usually a young and wealthy member of the lineage who was able to "buy" the support of his villagers.
18. According to Kuan and Lau (1979:33), the government offered a lot of resources in exchange for the rural leaders'

cooperation. These resources included money, "land exchange entitlement" in compensation for land surrendered, advance information on development plans, rights to private development, etc.

19. See the Savingram from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 3 March 1960 on the HYK in CO 1030/1333 "Heung Yee Kuk."
20. It gave the "Tsuen Wan faction" great advantage as they mostly came from urbanizing areas with a fast expanding population.
21. Now the number of councillors from each election district was proportional to the number of village representatives there instead of its population size. The *ex-officio* status of Rural Committee chairmen was also cancelled. Furthermore, the electoral college electing the councillors was no longer formed by the 28 Rural Committees' chairmen, but by all of the 900 village representatives.
22. See the Savingram from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 3 March 1960 on the HYK in CO 1030/1333 "Heung Yee Kuk."
23. CO 1030/1333 "Heung Yee Kuk," p. 9. Extracts from Legislative Council proceedings.
24. CO 1030/1333 "Heung Yee Kuk," pp. 18, 22. Extracts from Hong Kong Police Special Branch Report.
25. CO 1030/1333 "Heung Yee Kuk," p. 31. Extracts from Monthly Intelligence Report.
26. It was later reorganized into the Agricultural, Fisheries and Forestry Department in 1953.
27. Of course, it is difficult to distinguish "economic" reasons from "political" reasons, as the two are always intertwined. Hence, we are using the term "economic" in a very rough sense here.
28. The encouragement of vegetable growing in the prewar years was evidenced by the forming of the New Territories Agricultural Association in 1927 which was supported financially by the government. It organized annual agricultural shows serving to "stimulate vegetable production" (*Hong Kong Annual Report 1938*:52; *1947*:49).
29. The share of fisheries production was increased to 85%.
30. Loans were made from VMO Loan Fund, which provided credit, usually for periods of less than a year, at interest rates of 0.25% a month (compared with 10% from other sources). The cooperatives also handled other governmental or non-governmental loan funds for the farmers, such as the Kadoorie Agricultural Loan Fund and the Joseph Trust Fund (Topley 1964:182).
31. After examining the immigrant farmers' communities in Shatin, Aijmer finds that the Hakka villagers and the immigrant farmers were avoiding contact with each other. The farmers rarely resided in the village. Instead, they built huts at a corner of their farmland to live (Aijmer 1975).
32. Aijmer was impressed by the "red-hot" political atmosphere in the area during the turbulent years of 1967-68. He saw a vegetable carrying lorry painted with the slogan "down with Soviet Imperialism!." He was also surprised to find that the farmland was surrounded by revolutionary songs as the immigrant farmers listened to the Guangdong radio station when they were working in the field.
33. Strauch (1984) notes a competition for local influence over immigrant farmers in a village in Tai Po between a leftist union and the cooperative.
34. After 1967, some urban leftist went into the immigrant communities to rebuild their "second front" organizations. In the 1970s, leftist unions and farmers' associations based on rural membership developed considerably. The *Nung-muk chik-kung-ooi* (The Graziers Union) mentioned by Strauch (1984) was one example.
35. The stoppage of rice importation from China was not a serious problem as it was easily remedied by increasing the appropriation of rice stock from Southeast Asia, USA and Australia (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 4 July 1967).

36. It is a term coined by Strauch (1984) to describe the drastic shift from rice cultivation to vegetable gardening over the 1950s.
37. The importance of government support can be seen in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the foodstuff supply from mainland China became more stable owing to the open-door policy. Subsequently, government support of local production was withdrawn, resulting in a drastic decline of New Territories' vegetable production.
38. Unfortunately, there is no description of the outcome of the bargaining in Chau and Lau (1982).
39. More empirical data related to the topic are being collected by Ho-fung Hung, and a more fully-fledged explanation of the paradoxical "rural stability," together with the changes in the 1980s is expected to be presented in his forthcoming M.Phil. thesis.

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The Colonial State and Rural Protests in Hong Kong

Abstract

From the British colonization of the New Territories in 1899 to the 1970's, the attitudes of the rural residents towards the colonial government appeared to change dramatically from armed resistance to active support. In this paper, we are going to take a fresh look at this question and examine the basis for the political stability in the rural areas of the Colony of Hong Kong. By tackling this issue, we also hope to contribute to the understanding of broader issues of colonial governance in Hong Kong and the relationship between state and society under British colonialism. We shall first review past attempts to answer the question of rural stability and pinpoint some of their shortcomings. Then, we shall delineate the development of colonial rule in the New Territories since the late nineteenth century. We shall divide our discussion into four different parts. The first looks at the situation of the New Territories prior to the imposition of British colonial rule. The second describes the process of colonization and the establishment of colonial governance over the area before the outbreak of the Pacific War. A third section turns to the postwar period and discusses the critical period of rapid socio-economic transformation in the New Territories. The fourth section then uses several cases to illustrate our arguments.

香港殖民政府與鄉郊民間抗爭

趙永佳　孔誥烽

（中文摘要）

從一八九九年英國強佔「新界」到二十世紀七十年代，新界居民對殖民政府的態度出現極大轉變，由初期武裝反抗轉變到後來大力支持殖民統治。本文嘗試探討這轉變的原因，並討論香港鄉郊地區政治相對穩定的因素，期能進一步了解香港殖民管治的性質及國家與社會在殖民主義下之關係。本文先回顧以往之相關研究以指出其不足之處，再進而勾劃新界在殖民統治下的政治發展軌跡。後者的討論分爲四部份，第一部份爲新界在建立殖民統治前的情況；第二部份敘述新界殖民地化的經過及至二次大戰前的發展；第三部份探討戰後新界在社會經濟結構上之重大改變的政治脈絡；最後我們以幾個個案來驗證我們的主要論據。