

*Social Conflicts in Hong Kong*  
1987-1995

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## Social Conflicts in Hong Kong

1987-1995

[T]here is growth and there is poverty. Requirement of innovation competes with demand for justice. Such antinomies offer a first glimpse of the modern social conflict.... [S]ome people devote their energies to wealth creation, others to the extension of civil rights, and more often than not the two parties are at odds with each other. This is strange, because it is not inevitable. Liberty needs both, prosperity and citizenship.... The politics of liberty is the politics of living with conflict.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In Hong Kong, there has been no sustained attempt to build a political alternative to the dominant power structure or any large-scale pursuit for systemic change observed to date. Neither has there been any discernible organized struggle between social groups that are divided by generalized barriers of power and entitlement. However, we are all aware of the fact that we are living in a conflict-ridden world. Underlying this macrostability are the ubiquitous and upsurging social conflicts in both private and public spheres, ranging from intra-familial conflict, inter-group conflict, sectorial conflict, state-people conflict to conflict between Hong Kong people and the Chinese government as well as overseas polities. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, a variety of social forces — the rising public aspiration for quality of life, the conscientization of citizen entitlements, the growing demands on government intervention and provision, the partial democratization of the government and the subsequent limited expansion of political opportunity and burgeoning party politics — has formed the breeding ground for social activism. More and

more issues are to be articulated and organized in the forms of social conflict and targeted at the polity. In addition, the scheduled transfer of sovereignty, which brings about drastic yet uncertain changes in nearly every social institution and social ethos, has triggered off various kinds of social conflict at unprecedented pace and scale.

It is now commonly accepted that social conflict can be a positive factor. It may increase rather than decrease the adaptation or adjustment of social relationships or groups by, for example, facilitating a sense of identity and solidarity, enhancing interactions between unequal parties, preventing social stagnation, reducing system strains, or creating new systems of social institutions and values. In Eckstein and Gurr's words, "the risk of chronic low-level conflict is one of the prices democrats should expect to pay for freedom from regimentation by the state — or by authorities in other social unit, whether industrial establishments, trade unions, schools and universities, or families."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, how to manage and resolve the proliferation of social conflicts and how to make these conflicts more productive and less costly become one of our major concerns in sustaining Hong Kong's socio-political stability and development.

Observers of the Hong Kong society have offered profound insights into the foundation of socio-political stability<sup>3</sup> as well as ample illustrations of various types of social conflict.<sup>4</sup> Cheung and Louie's study is the first archival attempt to compile a comprehensive and machine-readable database on social conflicts in Hong Kong that covers a 12-year period from 1975 to 1986.<sup>5</sup>

The main objective of the present study is two-fold. Firstly, we aim to construct a more elaborate classification scheme that could facilitate a long-term documentation and analysis of local social conflict events. Secondly, we began the work by gathering basic information on every social conflict event that happened in the last, and probably the most turbulent, years of the colonial rule. We focus on the measurement of various properties of social conflict events as well as the mapping of their patterns and trends. Since our data on conflict events are limited to the aggregate level,

no attempt is made to examine social conflict at the group level or the individual level.

A quantitative analysis of the profile and trend of social conflict over the span of 1987 to 1995 is presented below after a brief description of our conception of social conflict, the research design and the sources of data.

## Research Design and Data Sources

### *Conception of Social Conflict*

"Conflict is a theme that has occupied the thinking of man more than any other, save only God and love."<sup>6</sup> The most distinctive characteristic of contemporary conflict research is the widespread reliance on quantification. Quantitative study on conflict developed between World War I and II.<sup>7</sup> It was fuelled by the myriad of revolutionary wars in developing countries and riotous protests in Western democracies in the 1960s. Since then, a wide array of definitions and classification schemes have been developed. For example, Coser defines social conflict as a "struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflict groups are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals."<sup>8</sup> Boulding defines it as "a situation of competition in which the parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions and in which each party wishes to occupy a position that is incompatible with the wishes of the other."<sup>9</sup> Himes defines it as "purposeful struggles between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents and to gain status, power, resources, and other scarce values."<sup>10</sup> Blalock defines it as "the intentional mutual exchange of negative sanctions, or punitive behaviors, by two or more parties."<sup>11</sup>

There is no definition of social conflict that commands consensus to date though most of these definitions have much in common. In this study, we have adopted a broad working defini-

tion proposed by Gurr: "conflict phenomena are the overt, coercive interactions of contending collectivities."<sup>12</sup> There are four distinguishing properties of these interactions:

1. Two or more parties are involved. These contesting parties as well as third neutral parties may be individuals, corporate actors or quasi-groups, for example, social class, racial or ethnic groups, with less-defined boundaries.
2. They engage in mutually opposing actions. One of these parties may be involved through its representative(s) or the proxy of its symbols or property. Some kinds of conflict incident that are without mutually opposing actions, for example, letters written by an individual or a group to a newspaper editor or a particular newspaper column, or protest advertisements, are excluded from our sample.
3. They use coercive behaviour that is designed to destroy, injure, thwart, control or influence their opponent(s). Coercive behaviour may range from violent, threatening to nonviolent action. Its objectives can be instrumental (such as an attempt to gain control of scarce resources and positions or to influence behaviour in certain direction) and/or expressive (such as an attempt to satisfy anger, thirst for excitement or desire for group solidarity). Yet, reports on violent crime (such as rape, assault, murder, robbery with firearms) and nonviolent crime (such as burglary, theft, criminal damage) undertaken by an individual or a small group of individuals, intra-familial conflicts and inter-personal conflicts are excluded from the analysis.
4. These contentious interactions are overt, hence, their occurrence can easily be detected and agreed upon by independent observers.<sup>13</sup>

### Sources of Data

Following this conception, we inventoried every social conflict event occurring between 1 January 1987 and 31 December 1995 as reported in:

1. the *Ming Pao Daily News*,<sup>14</sup> or
2. the classified newspaper clippings on the Hong Kong society maintained by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>15</sup>

Content analysis was adopted to collect information from these newspaper reports. Admittedly, problems of reliability and validity would arise from the limited coverage of the data sources. Limitations of using newspaper reports as primary data source are well documented. Major errors of our database are probably due to:

- nonreporting and underreporting of conflict events, in particular those not deemed by the press as newsworthy,
- incorrect reporting on the properties, such as duration, scale and intensity, of individual conflict event, and
- miscount of a series of related conflict events as individual events.

In view of this, supplementary information from other sources should be consulted in further analysis of the data. Though not perfect in faultless completeness and descriptive accuracy, newspaper report on social conflicts in Hong Kong is relatively free from political censorship, suppression or distortion. However, it should be noted that the voluminous data are of uneven quality. While information on the location, objective, demand, nature and mode of action of conflict events are generally distinctly described in newspaper reports, the information on the number and background of initiators and participants, number of non-participants affected as well as the outcome of collective actions is often found to be insufficient.

### Data Processing and Validation

A tentative classification and coding scheme was constructed in early 1996. Two coders were employed and were instructed to code mainly the manifest content of the newspaper reports. At the beginning, a set of newspaper reports on 45 social conflict events

was coded by each of them independently. With the exception of conflict objective, the extent of agreement was consistently high. They then completed the coding of 5.5 years of observation. Rules of thumb were set and new codes were added accordingly. Five more coders were subsequently recruited and were trained to follow the coding rules. At the end, 30 per cent of the newspaper reports were recoded by checkers to help estimating and reducing coding errors.

The "key-to-disc" method was employed to key in the codes on the coding sheets into the computer. The input data were proof-read once to ensure accuracy. They then passed through range check for every data item and logic check for related data items.

## Profile and Trend of Social Conflict

### Temporal Distribution

Our sample records a total of 3,661 social conflict events that occurred during the period of 1987 to 1995, yielding a yearly average of 407 and a monthly average of 34.<sup>16</sup> Table 1 presents the number of social conflict events by year and the percentage change over the preceding year.

As expected, the greatest number of social conflict events occurred in 1989, the year of the June 4th Incident and the historic march with over a million participants in the territory. In that year, 525 cases were recorded, a drastic increase of 63 per cent over that in the preceding year. Of these events, 27.4 per cent took place in June and July. The year 1990 came next, with a report of 509 events. About 67.1 per cent of these conflict events happened in the first half of the year. The year 1987 marked the lowest record: 300 events. It was followed by 1988 (322 events), 1991 (358 events) and 1995 (362 events).

Cheung and Louie's study recorded altogether 882 social conflict events and noted that the number of social conflicts had increased from year to year during the period of 1975 to 1986 — 35

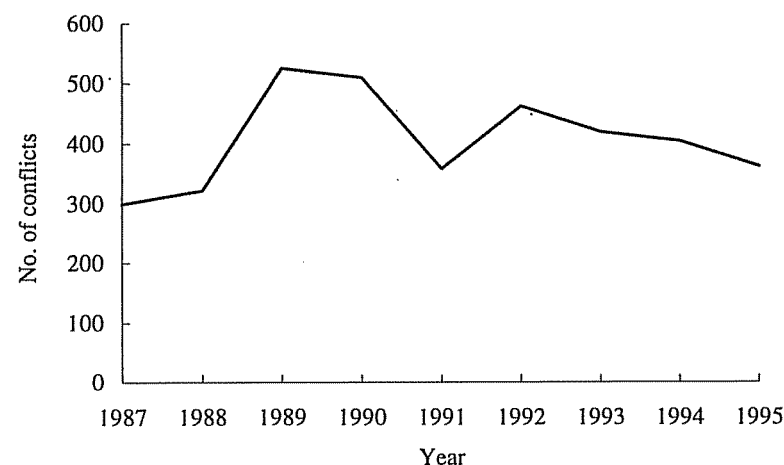
cases in 1975 to 136 cases in 1986.<sup>17</sup> Our data show that, with the exception of 1989, 1991 and 1992, the number of social conflicts per year neither rise nor fall decisively (Figure 1). Excluding these three years, the year-to-year fluctuations range from 3 per cent to 10.4 per cent. Against common sense understanding, the overall pattern of social conflicts in the first half of the 1990s, except the rise in 1992, showed a downward trend.

**Table 1** Number of Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Number	300	322	525	509	358	462	410	404	362	3,661
(%)	(8.2)	(8.8)	(14.3)	(13.9)	(9.8)	(12.6)	(11.4)	(11.0)	(9.9)	(100.0)
% change <sup>(1)</sup>		+7.3	+63.0	-3.0	-29.7	+29.0	-9.3	-3.6	-10.4	

Note: (1) Percentage change over the preceding year.

**Figure 1** Trend of Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995



### *Spatial Distribution*

The location in which a social conflict event took place is recorded at its point of origin as well as its destination, if the latter is different from the former.

On the whole, the locations of 11.3 per cent collective actions were not mentioned in the newspaper reports. In terms of year-to-year variation, the proportions of social conflicts with unknown location range widely from 5.6 to 18.7 per cent. It is relatively higher in the years 1987 (18.7 per cent), 1992 (14.1 per cent) and 1990 (13.8 per cent) and lower in 1991 (5.6 per cent) and 1995 (6.4 per cent).

As shown in Table 2, government buildings were the most popular venues for public voicing of claims. Over one-third of our total recorded conflicts occurred in such locations — 17.0 per cent at the Legislative Council (Legco) building and the Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (OMELCO), 7.3 per cent at the Governor House and 12.4 per cent at other government buildings. It should be noted that 17.0 per cent of the events counted under the category of Legco building actually took place at the Governor House and/or public places as well.

Except for the year 1989, the Legco building was the most popular location for collective action. For example, 28.3 per cent of the conflicts reported in 1987 took place there. From 1993 onwards, the proportion of collective actions taking place at Legco building has dropped to around 10 per cent.

The share of social conflicts occurring at the Governor House was relatively stable. In most of the years under study, it was around 6 to 7 per cent. The year 1993 witnessed the highest proportion (11.2 per cent), while 1987, the lowest (3.7 per cent).

Other government buildings regularly attracted over one-tenth of the conflicts. Among these events, 60.0 per cent occurred during 1990 and 1993.

Collective actions in front of the New China News Agency (NCNA) office were usually highly publicized by the mass media. According to our records, 5.8 per cent of the total conflict events

took place at the NCNA. Among these events, only 1.9 and 2.8 per cent were recorded in 1987 and 1988, respectively. It then rose drastically to 20.1 and 17.3 per cent in 1989 and 1990, respectively. The second peak was marked in 1994, with a proportion of 20.6 per cent.

Apart from the NCNA, the role of other Chinese government-related authorities in the territory, such as the Preliminary Working Committee and the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, in local social conflicts was always negligible.

Business and industrial places were never a popular venue for collective action. On the whole, only 3.1 per cent of all the recorded conflicts took place in such locations. Yet, it could be observed that its proportion remained stable at around 2 to 3 per cent from 1987 to 1993 and, then, doubled to 5.2 and 6.1 per cent in 1994 and 1995, respectively.

About 19.2 per cent of the recorded collective actions actually took place on the street. In 1987, less than 10 per cent of the social conflicts occurred in such public places. This kind of out-of-door collective actions rose dramatically and peaked in 1989 (26.9 per cent). Its proportion then more or less stabilized at around 21 per cent from 1993 onwards. Table 3 breakdowns the location of these out-of-door events by district board district.

The Central and Western District, in which the Legco, the central government and the Governor house were located, was definitely the most popular spot for collective action. Nearly one out of four took place in this district. The peaks arrived in 1990 (29.1 per cent) and 1993 (31.9 per cent).

Next on the list were the districts of Wan Chai and Yau Tsim. The proportions of social conflicts occurring in these districts were 6.6 and 6.1 per cent, respectively. Of the conflict events in Wan Chai District, 32.6 per cent happened in 1989, whereas 44.2 per cent of those in Yau Tsim District occurred in 1994 and 1995.

Southern District on the Hong Kong Island, Wong Tai Sin and Shum Shui Po in Kowloon, and Tai Po, North District and Sha Tin in the New Territories could be characterized as comparatively

Table 2 Location of Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Government building										
Legco building <sup>(1)</sup>	28.3	25.2	9.7	17.3	24.9	19.9	10.5	13.1	11.3	17.0
Governor House <sup>(2)</sup>	3.7	6.5	6.3	6.5	6.4	8.0	11.2	8.7	7.7	7.3
Others <sup>(3)</sup>	11.3	10.6	5.7	13.4	15.4	15.8	18.1	9.4	12.4	12.4
New China News Agency <sup>(4)</sup>	1.3	1.9	8.2	7.3	7.3	2.6	3.1	10.9	8.0	5.8
PWC/PC	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1
Business/Industrial place <sup>(5)</sup>	2.3	3.7	1.5	2.2	2.8	2.4	2.9	5.2	6.1	3.1
Public place <sup>(6)</sup>	9.7	15.8	26.9	16.9	15.4	18.6	21.7	21.5	21.0	19.2
Others	24.7	24.5	32.4	22.6	22.3	18.6	20.5	20.0	26.8	23.7
Unknown	18.7	11.5	9.3	13.8	5.6	14.1	11.7	10.9	6.4	11.3
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

(1) Includes Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (OMELCO).

Five events took place in both the Legco building and public places; 101 events took place in Legco building, Governor House/public places.

(2) A total of 18 events took place in both the Governor House and public places.

(3) Includes Vietnamese boat people detention centres. Nine events took place in both government buildings and public places.

(4) Fourteen events took place in NCNA and public places; 29 events took place in NCNA and Legco building/Governor House/government buildings.

(5) Includes construction sites. Two events took place in both business/industrial buildings and public places.

(6) Includes only those on-the-street actions. Other in-door public places, such as the airport, the Art Centre, fish market, government hospitals are classified into the category of "Others."

NCNA = New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch);

PWC = Preliminary Working Committee, Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region;

PC = Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

**Table 3** Out-of-door Social Conflict Events by District Board District, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Central and Western	13.8	25.5	25.5	29.1	21.8	27.9	31.9	18.4	18.4	24.6
Wan Chai	6.9	2.0	10.6	5.8	3.6	4.7	7.7	9.2	2.6	6.6
Eastern	3.4	7.8	0.7	0.0	0.0	4.7	5.5	2.3	1.3	2.6
Southern	6.9	2.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	1.2	1.1	0.0	2.6	1.1
Kowloon City	10.3	2.0	0.0	1.2	3.6	4.7	0.0	4.6	2.6	2.4
Kwun Tong	3.4	5.9	2.8	0.0	1.8	2.3	2.2	5.7	3.9	3.0
Mong Kok	3.4	0.0	2.8	3.5	1.8	0.0	1.1	6.9	11.8	3.6
Sham Shui Po	0.0	5.9	1.4	1.2	3.6	1.2	1.1	0.0	1.3	1.6
Wong Tai Sin	10.3	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	1.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	1.1
Yau Tsim	0.0	0.0	6.4	1.2	5.5	4.7	7.7	11.5	11.8	6.1
Islands	3.4	0.0	2.8	3.5	1.8	1.2	2.2	2.3	0.0	2.0
North	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	1.8	0.0	4.4	3.4	1.3	1.4
Sai Kung	10.3	0.0	7.1	0.0	1.8	2.3	1.1	4.6	7.9	3.8
Sha Tin	3.4	2.0	0.7	4.7	0.0	0.0	2.2	1.1	2.6	1.7
Tai Po	3.4	2.0	0.7	1.2	0.0	1.2	0.0	2.3	2.6	1.3
Tsuen Wan	3.4	2.0	1.4	1.2	0.0	0.0	3.3	6.9	3.9	2.4

**Table 3** Out-of-door Social Conflict Events by District Board District, 1987-1995 (%) (Continued)

Kwai Tsing	6.9	2.0	2.1	1.2	1.8	3.5	5.5	3.4	3.9	3.1
Tuen Mun	0.0	15.7	4.3	1.2	3.6	2.3	8.8	2.3	1.3	4.3
Yuen Long	0.0	7.8	1.4	2.3	3.6	0.0	0.0	6.9	3.9	2.7
More than one district	10.3	17.6	26.2	43.0	43.6	37.2	12.1	8.0	15.8	24.5
(N)	(29)	(51)	(141)	(86)	(55)	(86)	(91)	(87)	(76)	(702)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Events taking place at government buildings and the NCNA were excluded.

tranquil. The respective percentages of social conflicts located in these districts were only 1.1, 1.1, 1.6, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.7 per cent.

About one quarter of the total conflict events took place in more than one districts. Such multi-district collective actions reached their peak in 1991, with 43.6 per cent, followed by 1990 (43 per cent) and 1992 (37.2 per cent). The lowest proportion of these events occurred in 1994, with only 8.0 per cent.

On the whole, almost one quarter of the social conflicts took place elsewhere, including the Kai Tak International Airport, schools, hospitals, churches, consulates, offices of members of representative institutions; others took the form of press conferences; and yet, others occurred in Mainland China.

### *Magnitude and Intensity*

The magnitude and intensity of a social conflict event are estimated in regard to its duration; number of participants, initiators and parties involved; number of other persons affected; extent of violence which includes the maximum form of violence against persons, the maximum damage against property and the maximum form of governmental repressive force; and number of casualties and arrests incurred. Generally speaking, the extents of magnitude and intensity of a social conflict are positively related to its length of duration, breadth of participation, degree of violence, as well as amount of damage, casualty and arrest.

### **Duration**

People participating in a collective action usually do so for certain particular instrumental and/or expressive reason. The cost, in terms of energy, emotion, time, political risk or else, of participation is in general negatively related to the duration of the collective conflict. To the outsider, and sometimes even to the insider, the beginning and the end of a social conflict can be very arbitrary. Sometimes, there is an explicit agreement among the major contending parties that the conflict concerned has ended. Sometimes, a conflict may wither away and be implicitly ended. Yet, many

collective struggles are incessant efforts with only intermittent overt interactions between contending parties. Students of social conflict have to demarcate, at times arbitrarily, the beginning and the end of every conflict event so as to assess the other properties, such as outcome, of the event. In coding the duration of the recorded social conflicts, we tend to follow the manifest content of the newspaper reports. If different events can be traced as the development of a specific conflict, for example, with the same objective and the same participants, they are counted as one event. If not, they are treated as different cases.

On the whole, 7.3 per cent of the recorded social conflicts were of unknown duration. Of these events, 34.5 per cent occurred in 1990.

Our sample of social conflicts shows that the duration of the majority of collective actions was very short. It seldom lasted more than a day. Eight out of ten recorded events lasted less than half a day. About 9.2 per cent lasted half a day to one day, 1.1 per cent two days, 1 per cent three days, and 1.5 per cent four days or more (see Table 4). The longest event that lasted nearly a year was a petition to the government for a special amnesty to a "mother without a Hong Kong identity card" (無證媽媽).

Excluding those unknown cases, the duration of social conflicts in recent years appears to be longer than that in the 1980s. For example, while 95.2 per cent of those conflict events in 1987 lasted less than half a day, the corresponding percentages for 1994 and 1995 were 80.3 and 79.4 per cent — a decline of around 15 per cent.

### **Number of Initiators, Participants and Parties Involved**

The size of participants in a social conflict is one of its most visible attributes. It is crucial not only to the attraction of media and public attention, but also to its own mobilization and development. The gathering of a large number of supporters might generate a sense of power that strengthens the belief that a grievance can be redressed or a goal can be attained. Empirical studies of



**Table 4** Estimated Duration of Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Less than 1/2 day	91.7	84.8	85.3	73.1	84.1	74.9	79.5	74.5	76.8	80.0
1/2 - 1 day	2.0	5.6	5.7	6.7	5.9	15.6	8.4	13.9	17.7	9.2
2 days	0.3	1.6	0.8	1.2	1.1	0.6	1.7	1.2	1.1	1.1
3 days	0.7	3.1	0.6	0.2	1.1	0.6	1.9	1.5	0.3	1.0
4 days or more	1.7	1.9	3.0	0.8	0.8	1.3	1.0	1.7	0.8	1.5
Unknown	3.7	3.1	4.6	18.1	7.0	6.9	7.6	7.2	3.3	7.3
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

collective action generally reveal that the larger the number of participants, the smaller the cost each participant in the action has to bear, the higher the likelihood of attaining their objective, and the greater the willingness of individuals to join in.

Tables 5 and 6 summarize the overall pattern as well as the year-to-year variation of the estimated numbers of initiators and participants. On the whole, 26.5 per cent of our collection of newspaper reports on social conflict did not mention the number of initiators, and 44.8 per cent did not present the number of participants. It should also be noted that most of the available information was given in rough estimation.

Apart from those with an unknown number of initiators, the pattern is clear and consistent: the absolute majority of the recorded social conflicts were initiated by named groups instead of individual persons; conflicts with no initiator were extremely rare. For example, while 95.6 per cent of the contentious events were initiated by named associations, only 3.9 per cent were initiated by individual persons and only 15 cases were identified as with no initiator.

The percentages of social conflicts with an unknown number of participants range widely from 33.2 per cent (1991) to 57.7 per cent (1987). Excluding these unknown cases, nearly half of the collective actions involved less than 50 participants — 23.8 per cent with less than 10 participants, 13.2 per cent with 11-20 participants and 12.4 per cent with 21-50 participants. Contentious actions with a large number of participants were rather infrequent. During the nine-year period under study, only 10.7 per cent had mobilized over 1,000 persons to participate. About 64.8 per cent of these large-scale events occurred between 1989 and 1991.

Social conflicts occur within a social context that includes many other parties: audience, potential allies, adversaries and, sometimes, potential beneficiaries of the losses suffered by the contending groups. The number of parties involved in a conflict not only would bring changes in the relative power and resources of the contending parties, but also increase the complexity of intra-party as well as inter-party relationships.

**Table 5** Estimated Number of Initiators, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
None	0.7	0.9	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.4
1	0.7	1.6	1.5	0.2	0.6	0.2	1.4	2.2	0.8	1.0
2-5	0.0	1.2	1.1	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.4
6-10	1.3	0.9	0.6	1.0	1.1	0.2	0.2	1.2	0.3	0.7
11 and over	0.7	0.9	1.3	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.7	0.0	0.7
Named association	68.0	68.3	67.8	79.0	74.0	68.4	76.6	66.1	61.6	70.3
Unknown	28.7	26.1	27.2	18.3	23.7	31.2	20.0	28.5	37.3	26.5
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 6** Estimated Number of Participants, 1987-1995 (%) <sup>(1)</sup>

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
1-10	11.3	16.1	13.7	16.1	11.5	12.1	7.6	15.1	13.8	13.1
11-20	6.7	5.9	5.5	9.6	9.8	6.9	8.4	6.9	5.5	7.3
21-50	6.3	6.5	3.6	5.9	7.5	7.8	7.6	7.7	9.7	6.8
51-100	5.3	5.6	5.9	5.5	6.4	10.6	8.6	6.7	6.6	6.9
101-500	5.7	6.2	6.9	6.7	12.8	8.2	7.2	6.4	8.3	7.6
501-1,000	2.0	2.8	1.0	2.6	1.4	1.5	1.2	2.5	1.1	1.7
1,001-5,000	1.3	2.8	5.0	4.1	4.5	2.4	2.1	3.0	1.9	3.1
5,001-20,000	0.3	0.3	2.9	4.1	4.5	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.6	1.8
20,001 and over	0.3	0.9	2.7	1.0	1.7	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.3	1.0
Others <sup>(2)</sup>	3.0	1.9	3.6	9.0	6.7	6.7	8.4	6.9	4.4	5.8
Unknown	57.7	50.9	49.3	35.4	33.2	42.4	47.7	43.8	47.8	44.8
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

(1) If an event involved more than one mode of action, only the number of participants in the first-mentioned action was included in this table.

(2) Includes press conferences, open letters to the contending parties, etc.

Excluding the target party against which aggrieved participants make their claims and the third party that mediates the conflict, parties involved in a social conflict are classified into three types: the alignment, the independent and the antagonist. If two or more parties participate in the same conflict event and act in cooperation with each other to pursue the same goal, we consider these parties to be an alignment. If two or more parties take part in the same event and act independently to pursue the same goal, we classify them to be independents. If two or more parties involved in the same event hold incompatible views or goals on the issue in contention, and act opposingly to pursue their own goal, we name them antagonists. To the claim-making party, the involvement of bystander parties as allies would generally increase its resources and capacity to attain its goal, but the presence of antagonists is usually detrimental to its bargaining power.

Table 7 summarizes the estimated number of parties involved in our account of social conflicts. The proportion of events with insufficient information in this respect is relatively low — 4.8 per cent for the number of alignments, 1.0 per cent for independents and 0.1 per cent for antagonists. However, the proportion of collective actions with unknown number of alignments increased to over 10 per cent in 1994 and 1995.

On the whole, 76.6 per cent of the recorded conflict events consisted of only one claim-making party. About 4.3 per cent had one alignment, 6.7 per cent two to five alignments, 3.1 per cent six to ten alignments, and 4.5 per cent more than ten alignments.

The occurrence of social conflicts with a larger number of alignments, i.e., more than five, seems to have been more prevailing in the earlier years. For example, excluding the unknown cases, the proportions of conflict events with more than five alignments amounted to 10.8 per cent in 1987 and 11.6 per cent in 1988, the respective figures for 1994 and 1995 were 5.0 per cent and 3.7 per cent.

The presence of independents as well as antagonists in a contentious action was very rare. From 1987 to 1995, social conflicts with independents and antagonists amounted to 1.3 and 1.0

per cent, respectively. It seems that the existence of independent as well as antagonistic parties in a conflict event is on the increase. For example, while there were no independents nor antagonists recorded in 1987, the corresponding percentages with no such party presence dropped to 94.8 and 97.0 per cent in 1995.

### Number of Other Persons Affected

As indicated in Table 8, our information on the number of non-participants affected by the conflict events is far from reliable. Nearly four out of ten recorded events were found to provide insufficient information. And, that proportion ranged widely from 21.0 per cent (1990) to 58.7 per cent (1989).

As reported by the press, it seems that the majority of collective actions were confined to the conflict participants. In our data set, only five cases were reported to have non-participants affected. For example, one of them occurred when a 7,000-participant procession (from the Central District to the NCNA in Wan Chai District) was organized by the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China to protest against the imprisonment of social activists by the Chinese government in December 1990. During the procession, some roads were blocked by the police. As estimated by the China Bus Company, about 30,000 passengers had been affected.

### Extent of Violence

Unruliness and violence are probably the most conspicuous actions taken to attract publicity as well as the attention and responsiveness of the target party. However, as reported by many empirical conflict studies, the use of violence has been proved to be counterproductive for both contending parties. For example, the organizational effort of the weaker protesting party is actually compromised when its violent action is met with overwhelming force. For the stronger party, high repressive action may, in the longer run, lose its own public support and solidify the weaker party by creating martyrs. Besides, the degree of consistency,<sup>18</sup> instead of severity, is found to be more crucial in the use of

**Table 7** Estimated Number of Parties Involved, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Alignments</b>										
None	70.3	76.1	77.3	79.2	79.1	79.7	76.1	73.0	75.7	76.6
1	6.3	4.7	3.0	4.1	4.7	4.3	3.8	5.2	3.9	4.3
2-5	8.3	6.5	6.1	6.1	7.8	6.7	7.4	5.4	6.4	6.7
6-10	5.0	6.5	5.0	2.0	1.7	2.2	3.8	2.0	0.6	3.1
11 and over	5.3	5.0	4.8	6.3	4.7	4.1	4.8	2.5	2.8	4.5
Unknown	4.7	1.2	3.8	2.4	2.0	3.0	4.1	11.9	10.8	4.8
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)
<b>Independents</b>										
None	98.7	99.4	98.5	99.0	96.6	98.3	99.3	93.8	94.8	97.7
1	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.6	1.7	1.3	0.2	1.5	2.2	0.8
2 and over	0.0	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.8	0.4	0.2	1.0	0.6	0.5
Unknown	1.3	0.0	1.0	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.2	3.7	2.5	1.0
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)
<b>Antagonists</b>										
None	100.0	99.7	99.0	99.4	99.4	99.6	98.1	98.3	97.0	98.9
1	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.2	1.4	1.5	2.5	0.8
2 and over	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.2
Unknown	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 8** Estimated Number of Other Persons Affected, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
None	71.3	73.6	41.1	78.8	62.6	60.0	73.5	59.9	68.8	64.7
1-100	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1
101 and over	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Unknown	28.7	25.8	58.7	21.0	37.2	40.0	26.5	39.9	31.2	35.2
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

coercion by a conflict party that is claiming jurisdiction over its adversary.

In this study, the extent of violence is measured in terms of the maximum form of violence against persons, the maximum damage against property and the maximum form of governmental repressive force. Tables 9 to 11 provide an outline of the whole picture.

Despite the voluminous number of conflict events, the occurrence of violence was very infrequent. Large-scale collective actions, such as mass processions and demonstrations, were in general decorous. Table 9 shows that only 1.1 per cent (39 cases) of the total recorded conflicts involved minor physical interactions such as pushing, scuffling and jostling; 0.1 per cent (3 cases) fist-fighting; 0.1 per cent (3 cases) throwing objects; and 0.1 per cent (3 cases) combat with arms. It is noteworthy that over half of the conflicts resulting in a minor degree of violence, i.e., from pushing, fist-fighting to throwing objects, occurred in 1994 and 1995 — 23.1 per cent in 1994 and 30.8 per cent in 1995.

All of the three cases involving combat with arms occurred in Vietnamese boat people detention centres. For example, during a conflict between rival groups in Whitehead Detention Centre in February 1990, 70 Vietnamese boat people and staff of the Correctional Services Department were injured; more than 800 weapons were seized; and the police had fired 42 cans of tear-gas during two fights to retake control.

Likewise, property damage incurred because of social conflict was extremely rare (see Table 10). During 1987 to 1995, only 0.1 per cent of our recorded conflicts were reported to have caused property damage. One case belonged to unintentional property damage and another five cases involved conversion of property or intentional destruction of property. Two of these recorded events were acts of vandalism committed by Vietnamese boat people in the detention centres. As reported by the police, extreme property damage was caused in the above-mentioned Whitehead Detention Centre riot: windows were smashed and guard bars, fixtures, gates, fences and drain covers were severely damaged.

**Table 9** Maximum Form of Violence against Persons, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No violence	99.0	98.4	98.3	99.4	98.3	99.4	99.8	97.0	96.1	98.5
Pushing, scuffling, jostling	1.0	0.6	0.2	0.4	1.7	0.6	0.2	2.2	3.3	1.1
Fist-fighting	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1
Throwing objects	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1
Combat with arms	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Unknown	0.0	0.3	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.3	0.2
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 10** Maximum Damage against Property, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No damage	100.0	99.7	99.2	99.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.3	99.4	99.7
Unintentional property damage	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0
Conversion, intentional destruction	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1
Unknown	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.3	0.2
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 11** Maximum Form of Governmental Repressive Force, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No police	89.0	72.4	63.8	64.6	62.3	71.9	69.7	60.1	53.3	66.8
Police present in routine capacities, surveillance	9.3	26.4	32.6	22.8	30.2	24.9	29.6	35.9	45.6	28.9
Police involvement, with non-injury equipment <sup>(1)</sup>	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.2	1.0	0.3	0.5
Police involvement, with severe equipment <sup>(2)</sup>	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1
Police involvement, with lethal arms	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Others	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.2
Unknown	1.0	0.6	2.5	12.2	6.4	2.8	0.5	2.5	0.6	3.6
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

(1) For example, tear gas, fire hoses, etc.

(2) For example, dogs, clubs, etc.

Table 11 suggests that governmental repression of popular collective action has been rather self-controlled. On average, 66.8 per cent of social conflicts were reported to have no police in presence. However, the proportion of contentious action with no police around is likely to drop. For example, while the proportion of social conflicts without the presence of police amounted to 89.0 per cent in 1987 and 72.4 per cent in 1988, the respective figures in 1993, 1994 and 1995 were 69.7, 60.1 and 53.3 per cent.

Our data show that the increasing involvement of police in contentious action was largely confined to surveillance. In 1995, 45.6 per cent of the social conflicts had police present in routine capacities or were under police surveillance. Over the years, active engagement of police was consistently uncommon. On the whole, 0.5 per cent of our account involved police patrolling among protesting participants with non-injury equipment and 0.1 per cent with more severe equipment. There was no report on the engagement of police in battle with protesting participants with lethal arms. No significant change in this respect is observed.

### Number of Casualties and Arrests

In every recorded event, casualties and arrests of conflict initiators, participants, third-party persons and non-participants were counted separately. For practical reasons, we enumerated only the number of deaths, woundings and arrests as allegedly occurring in the course or in the immediate aftermath of the social conflict events. Therefore, our data should only be regarded as minima of the total figures.

Table 12 shows the percentage of conflict events resulting in casualties and arrests as well as the total number of persons killed, hurt and arrested. In line with the uncommon use of violence in social conflicts, our sample reveals that none of the recorded events resulted in fatalities, and only a negligible proportion of people got hurt or arrested.

From 1987 to 1995, we found only one conflict event with one initiator wounded and 0.2 per cent with the initiator arrested — three persons in three different events.

Table 12 Social Conflict Events Resulting in Casualties and Arrests, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Person(s) killed</b>										
Initiator	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Participant	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Third-party person	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Non-participant	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Person(s) injured</b>										
Initiator	0.0	0.0	0.2 (1)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0 (1)
Participant	1.0 (6)	0.6 (8)	0.6 (30)	0.0	0.3 (1)	0.6 (6)	0.2 (3)	0.0	0.9 (8)	0.4 (62)
Third-party person	0.6 (6)	0.0	0.4 (11)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2 (1)	0.3 (2)	0.1 (20)
Non-participant	0.0	0.3 (3)	0.4 (25)	0.0	0.0	0.2 (14)	0.0	0.2 (4)	0.6 (15)	0.2 (61)
<b>Person(s) arrested</b>										
Initiator	0.0	0.0	0.2 (1)	0.0	0.3 (1)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3 (1)	0.1 (3)
Participant	0.3 (4)	0.6 (22)	0.4 (19)	0.0	0.6 (6)	0.4 (12)	0.4 (25)	0.2 (5)	0.0	0.2 (93)
Third-party person	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2 (2)	0.0	0.0 (2)
Non-participant	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Note: Figures in parentheses denote total number of persons.

Percentages of conflicts with participants injured and arrested were 0.4 and 0.2 per cent, respectively. As for the absolute numbers, altogether 62 participants were wounded in 16 conflict events and 93 participants were arrested in 12 conflict events.

Injuries and arrests of third-party persons and non-participants rarely happened. On average, there were only 0.1 per cent (20 persons in six events) of the recorded conflicts with third-party persons injured and two persons arrested in one conflict event. Sixty-one non-participants were injured in a total of seven conflicts, but no person was arrested.

### Issues in Contention

In this study, social conflict is defined as contending collectivities engaged in coercive interaction. Parties involved in a contention generally believe they have, or are going to have, conflicting goals that are worth striving for. The basic nature of issues in contention is classified into 18 major areas: civil rights and liberties, communication media, culture and religion, economics, education, environment, health and medical services, housing, labour and employment, legal and judicial, police, military and public order, politics and government, public works and utilities, social welfare, transport, urban planning and development, urban services and Vietnamese boat people. The scope of the issue in contention is assessed by the extent of impact for which the conflicting goal is aiming. It is classified into five within-Hong Kong categories, including territory-wide, regional, district, vicinity and sectorial, and two outside-Hong Kong categories, including China-related and overseas.

### Nature of Issue in Contention

In Table 13, a general picture of the nature of the major issue in contention during the period of 1987 to 1995 is portrayed. Conflicts relating to "labour and employment" and "civil rights and liberties" ranked first and second, respectively. More than one-third of all contentious actions in this nine-year study were related

Table 13 Nature of Major Issue in Contention, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total	Rank
Civil rights and liberties	15.0	3.1	28.8	17.7	15.6	8.7	8.1	21.8	13.8	15.4	2
Communication media	0.3	0.9	1.1	0.2	0.3	1.5	1.2	1.2	3.6	1.1	17
Culture and religion	1.3	0.9	0.4	3.7	1.1	1.1	1.7	4.7	1.4	1.9	14
Economics	5.7	5.9	1.0	4.7	15.1	4.3	3.6	3.0	2.2	4.8	8
Education	3.7	9.0	2.3	5.3	8.4	5.8	5.0	7.4	7.5	5.8	6
Environment	2.3	2.8	1.3	1.6	1.1	5.4	4.5	2.0	3.9	2.8	11
Health and medical services	1.7	0.3	4.2	2.9	1.1	2.2	2.1	1.5	1.9	2.2	13
Housing	7.7	5.6	0.6	8.1	12.6	14.3	12.6	11.6	12.4	9.3	3
Labour and employment	26.0	26.4	19.0	21.0	17.6	17.7	24.3	12.6	23.5	20.6	1
Legal and judicial	9.7	10.9	4.4	6.5	1.4	3.5	2.6	6.9	2.2	5.1	7
Police, military and public order	1.0	1.6	1.7	1.8	0.8	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.1	1.5	15
Politics and government	6.0	7.5	13.9	7.5	4.2	9.3	12.2	8.9	6.1	8.7	4
Public works and utilities	5.3	2.2	1.0	0.8	0.0	0.9	0.2	0.0	0.8	1.1	16
Social welfare	2.7	0.6	1.5	3.1	5.0	9.3	7.4	5.0	8.0	4.8	9
Transport	4.0	9.9	5.1	8.8	11.7	8.0	8.1	6.7	7.2	7.7	5
Urban planning and development	4.0	3.4	1.3	1.0	1.4	5.2	2.6	2.5	1.9	2.5	12
Urban services	2.7	0.9	0.2	1.4	0.6	0.6	1.7	0.5	0.3	0.9	18
Vietnamese boat people	0.0	8.1	11.8	2.6	2.0	0.2	0.0	1.0	1.9	3.3	10
Unknown	1.0	0.0	0.4	1.4	0.0	0.4	0.2	1.0	0.3	0.5	
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)	

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

to these two major issues — labour and employment matters accounted for 20.6 per cent and civil rights and liberties matters took up the other 15.4 per cent.

Conflicts about housing came third and made up 9.3 per cent of all our recorded events. Following it were conflicts pertaining to "politics and government" and "transport," with respective percentages of 8.7 and 7.7 per cent. Issues concerning "education," "legal and judicial" and "social welfare" accounted for 5.8, 5.1 and 4.8 per cent, respectively, of all events.

While issues concerning "labour and employment" made up the largest number of social conflicts, those relating to "economics" constituted only 4.8 per cent. Other issues, such as "Vietnamese boat people," "environment," "urban planning and development," "health and medical services," "culture and religion," "public order," "media," "public work and utilities" and "urban services," each only took up 1 to 3 per cent of all the recorded conflict events.

The five most frequent conflicting issues are presented in more detail in the following pages.

#### *Conflicts of Labour and Employment Nature*

In a capitalist society like Hong Kong, job is the major key to life chances. It determines not only one's income, but also one's social standing, lifestyle and self-esteem. The local labour market has experienced a rapid structural transformation in the past decade. During the period of 1986 to 1996, the proportion of working population in the manufacturing sector dwindled from 35.8 per cent to 18.9 per cent. The overall labour force participation rate dropped from 66.4 per cent to 62.8 per cent, with the most significant decline in female workers aged 55 and over.<sup>19</sup> Transforming from an industrial to a service economy, some segments of workers are cast out of the market. The process of de-industrialization hits the least-educated women and the elderly the hardest. Those who stay in the market also suffer from a feeling of continued uncertainty as well as a sense of decline.



Against this backdrop, the present data reveal that issues pertaining to labour and employment were the most common issue to be pursued collectively, with a report of 753 events in nine years. Figure 2 traces the fluctuating trend of these conflicts.

Table 14 shows that public sector employees, notwithstanding their relatively secure work condition, had been rather active in collective actions. Over one-third of the recorded conflicts of labour nature involved this segment of the working population. Among these conflicts, 95.1 per cent were related to white-collar workers, and they reached their peaks in 1988 and 1993.

Nearly half of the conflict events pertained to the private sector — 13.2 per cent related to blue-collar workers, 18.8 per cent to white-collar workers and 16.8 per cent to the issue of imported labour.

Collective actions concerning children and women employment as well as central provident fund were relatively infrequent. Of all the recorded events, half of them occurred in 1987, only 1.3 per cent related to children and women employment and 4 per cent to the issue of the central provident fund.

Excluding the conflicts pertaining to imported labour, children and women employment and central provident fund, 76.0 per cent of the collective actions of labour nature were concerned with wages, benefits and other conditions of work. This kind of conflict was relatively more prevailing in the late 1980s. On average, only 4.8 per cent concerned labour hazard and safety and 4.2 per cent related to industrial relations and labour unions (see Table 15).

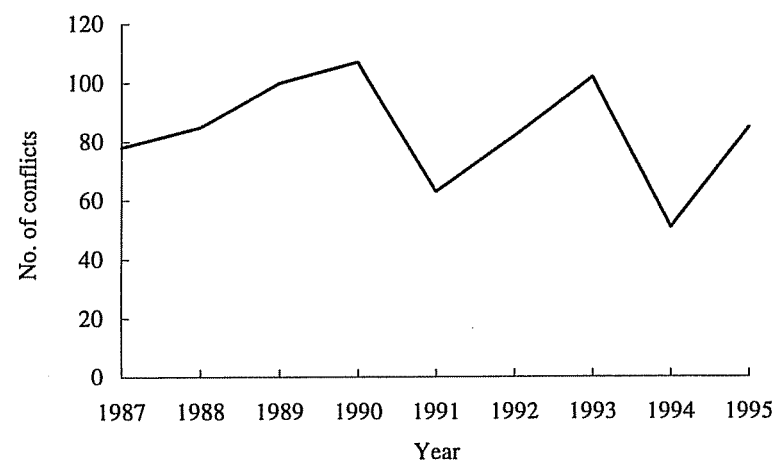
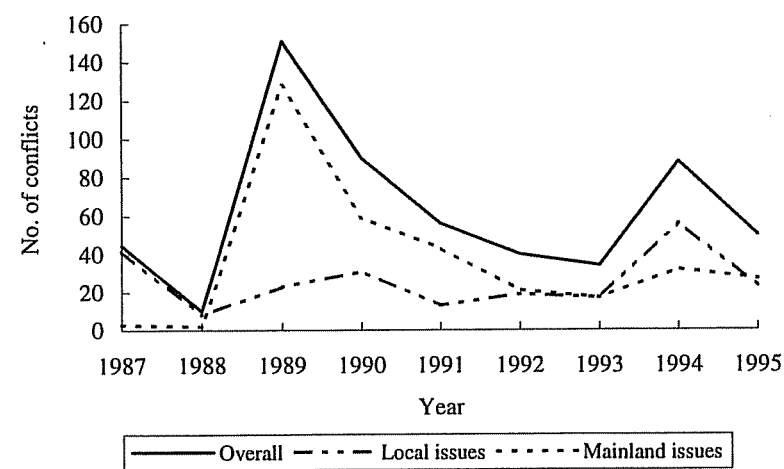
#### *Conflicts of Civil Rights Nature*

Social conflicts of civil rights nature comprise two major sub-categories of local and mainland issues. Figure 3 portrays the trend of overall civil rights-related contentions as well as that pertaining to local issues and mainland issues. The picture is unmistakably clear. By 1989, the frequency of social conflicts of civil rights nature leapt 15 times above that of the preceding year. The absolute majority of which were concerned with Mainland China is-

**Table 14** Conflicts of Labour Nature According to Sector, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Public sector</b>										
Blue-collar worker	0.0	4.7	2.0	1.9	4.8	0.0	0.0	5.9	0.0	1.9
White-collar worker	16.7	50.6	32.0	45.3	46.0	27.2	52.0	35.3	14.1	36.0
<b>Private sector</b>										
Blue-collar worker	10.3	16.5	14.0	5.7	14.3	19.8	15.7	9.8	12.9	13.2
White-collar worker	32.1	8.2	27.0	15.1	14.3	18.5	15.7	15.7	21.2	18.8
Foreign/imported labour	2.6	16.5	19.0	21.7	12.7	25.9	4.9	9.8	34.1	16.8
<b>General</b>										
Children and women	6.4	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	1.2	0.0	5.9	0.0	1.3
Central provident fund	19.2	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.6	0.0	4.9	9.8	3.5	4.0
Others	12.8	3.5	5.0	9.4	6.3	7.4	6.9	7.8	14.1	8.1
(N)	(78)	(85)	(100)	(106)	(63)	(81)	(102)	(51)	(85)	(751)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Figure 2** Trend of Conflict of Labour Nature, 1987-1995**Figure 3** Trends of Conflict of Civil Rights Nature, 1987-1995**Table 15** Conflicts of Labour Nature According to Issue, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Wages, benefits, conditions of work	80.4	89.7	85.3	69.4	74.0	77.4	58.8	73.5	80.5	76.0
Labour hazard and safety	8.7	5.9	6.7	5.6	0.0	7.5	2.4	2.9	2.4	4.8
Industrial relations, unions	6.5	2.9	4.0	6.9	2.0	1.9	7.1	0.0	2.4	4.2
Career services, training	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.2	2.0	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	1.1
Others	4.3	1.5	4.0	13.9	22.0	13.2	29.4	23.5	14.6	13.9
(N)	(46)	(68)	(75)	(72)	(50)	(53)	(85)	(34)	(41)	(524)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

sues. This kind of conflict events decreased gradually to another bottom in 1993. It then rose apparently in 1994, with most of them related to local issues.

Table 16 gives the breakdown of local conflicts by their major issues in contention. Local issues accounted for 41.1 per cent of all the recorded civil rights-related conflicts, while those concerning Mainland China amounted to 58.9 per cent. With respect to the former, 39.7 per cent focussed on the freedom of speech and of the press. Of these events, 46.7 per cent took place in 1994.

About one quarter of local conflicts concerned the issue of human rights in general. This kind of collective actions became more common from 1993 onwards.

Contentious actions regarding consumer rights made up 11.6 per cent of all the recorded civil rights-related events. The majority of these conflicts (66.7 per cent) happened in 1987 and was followed by sporadic occurrence afterwards.

Neither the freedom of assembly nor the freedom of movement had been raised as a major issue of collective contention. Each constituted 5.2 per cent and 3.4 per cent, respectively, of our account of conflicts of civil rights nature.

In these nine years, the occurrence of other civil rights-related conflicts was very infrequent. For example, there were only two events related to the freedom of occupation, another two related to the freedom of arts and sciences, and some related to the freedom of information.

#### *Conflicts of Housing Nature*

Over the past decade, the proportions of Hong Kong population residing in private permanent housing and public rental housing have been very stable. Those who lived in private permanent housing accounted for 46.8 per cent in 1986, 47 per cent in 1991 and 46.9 per cent in 1996; the respective percentages for those living in public rental housing were 40.8, 40.5 and 38.5 per cent. Significant changes are found in the proportions of population living in subsidized sale flats and temporary housing. The former increased steadily from 4.1 per cent in 1986 to 7.5 per cent in 1991

**Table 16** Conflicts of Civil Rights Nature According to Issue, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Local issues</b>										
Freedom of speech/press	46.7	0.0	7.3	10.0	1.8	2.5	0.0	48.9	12.0	16.3
Consumer rights	40.0	20.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	5.0	0.0	1.1	4.0	4.8
Freedom of assembly	2.2	10.0	1.3	3.3	5.4	2.5	2.9	0.0	0.0	2.1
Freedom of movement	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.6	0.0	5.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.4
Human rights	2.2	40.0	4.0	7.8	7.1	10.0	38.2	11.4	22.0	10.6
Others	2.2	10.0	2.6	5.6	8.9	22.5	8.8	1.1	8.0	5.9
<b>Mainland issues</b>	6.7	20.0	84.8	65.6	76.8	52.5	50.0	36.4	54.0	58.9
(N)	(45)	(10)	(151)	(90)	(56)	(40)	(34)	(88)	(50)	(564)

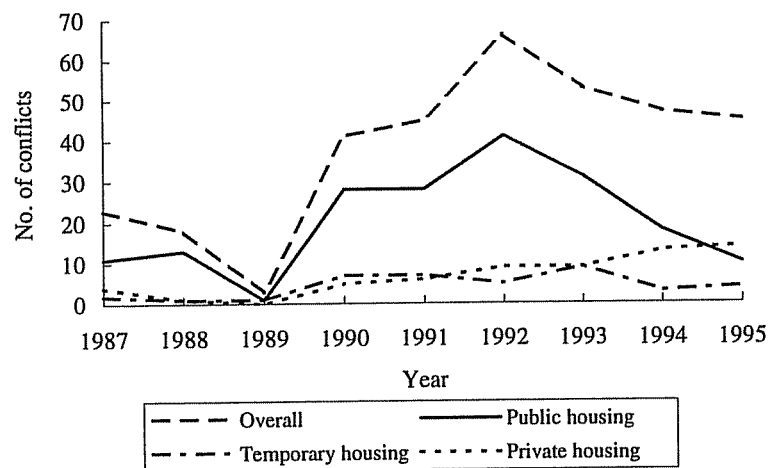
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

and 11.1 per cent in 1996, while the latter decreased from 6.7 per cent in 1986 to 3.6 per cent in 1991 and 2 per cent in 1996.<sup>20</sup>

There was a total of 341 conflict events related to various kinds of housing issues. Figure 4 portrays the overall trend of these events as well as those pertaining to public housing, private housing and temporary housing.

Social conflict related to housing issues reached its nadir in 1989, the year with the greatest number of recorded social conflict events. Compared with that in the late 1980s, housing conflicts rose prominently in 1990 and peaked in 1992. Table 17 gives the breakdown of these conflicts according to housing type. Over half of the social conflicts pertaining to housing were concerned with public housing — 42.5 per cent with Housing Authority rental housing, 5.9 per cent Housing Authority subsidized sale flats and

**Figure 4** Trends of Conflict of Housing Nature, 1987-1995



**Table 17** Conflicts of Housing Nature According to Housing Type, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Public housing</b>										
HA rental housing	30.4	66.7	0.0	43.9	46.7	57.6	50.9	31.9	15.6	42.5
HA subsidized sale flats	8.7	5.6	0.0	12.2	13.3	1.5	1.9	4.3	4.4	5.9
HS housing	8.7	0.0	33.3	12.2	2.2	3.0	5.7	2.1	2.2	4.7
<b>Private housing</b>										
Private housing	17.4	5.6	0.0	12.2	13.3	13.6	17.0	27.7	31.1	17.9
<b>Temporary housing</b>										
Temporary housing	8.7	5.6	33.3	17.1	15.6	7.6	17.0	6.4	8.9	11.4
<b>Others</b>										
Others	26.1	16.7	33.3	2.4	8.9	16.7	7.5	27.7	37.8	17.6
(N)	(23)	(18)	(3)	(41)	(45)	(66)	(53)	(47)	(45)	(341)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.  
HA = Housing Authority; HS = Housing Society.

4.7 per cent Housing Society housing. Conflicts related to Housing Authority subsidized sale flats were rather infrequent and 55.0 per cent of them happened in 1990 and 1991. Among the collective actions relating to Housing Authority rental housing, the distribution of the major sources of conflict is:

Rent	35.9 per cent
Allocation	17.9 per cent
Provision	11.0 per cent
Quality, facilities and others	35.2 per cent

Even though nearly half of the Hong Kong population is residing in private housing, less than one-fifth of the housing conflicts was related specifically to this type of housing. This kind of conflicts was quite infrequent in the late 1980s, and it rose steadily in the 1990s. About 73.8 per cent of these contentions occurred from 1992 onwards. On the whole, their major sources of discontent were:

Rent, price	24.6 per cent
Management	19.7 per cent
Quality, facilities and others	55.7 per cent

The proportion of population living in temporary housing was around 5 per cent. Yet, collective actions concerning this type of housing constituted 11.4 per cent of all the recorded events. Among these temporary housing-related conflicts, there was a surge between 1990 and 1993. About 71.8 per cent of such conflicts occurred in these four years.

#### *Conflicts of Political Nature*

Throughout the whole colonial history, the past decade can be regarded as a brand-new political context. It was brought about mainly by the scheduled transfer of sovereignty and the introduction of partial democratization. Since the ratification of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong in May 1985, Hong Kong has had to step into a transitional period before

it becomes a Special Administrative Region of China on 1 July 1997. The concomitant predomination of the Chinese government in local affairs has eroded the authority of the local government away and intensified all kinds of conflicts among political actors. The introduction of the top-down and partial democratic reform since 1984 has opened up a new political market, politicized the society, and, unfortunately, magnified political mistrust and cynicism among the public.

During the period of 1987 to 1995, a total of 320 conflict events concerning political issues was reported. Figure 5 depicts the rise and fall of these conflicts. This kind of collective actions witnessed its first peak in 1989, reached its nadir in 1991, and then saw its second peak in 1993.

Table 18 gives a summary of these conflicts. Of all the recorded events, 51.2 per cent were related to local affairs and 38.8 per cent pertained to external affairs.

**Figure 5** Trend of Conflict of Political Nature, 1987-1995

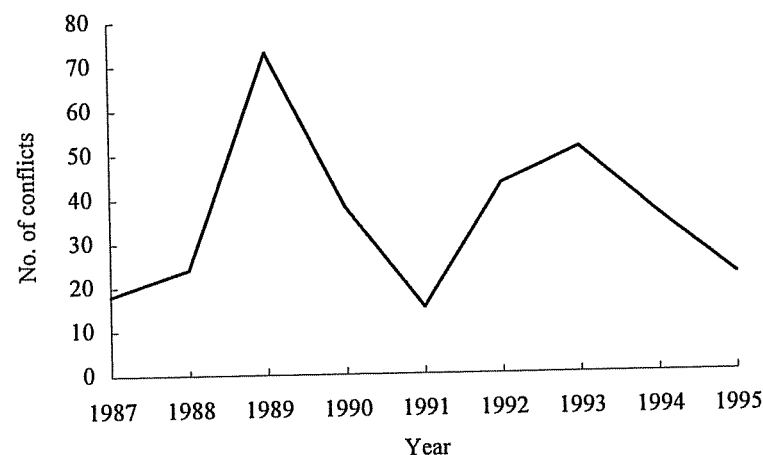


Table 18 Conflicts of Political Nature, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Internal affairs</b>										
Voting, representation	72.2	54.2	0.0	76.3	6.7	11.6	17.6	16.7	27.3	25.6
Government performance	0.0	0.0	5.5	0.0	20.0	34.9	11.8	19.4	0.0	10.9
Political reform	11.1	4.2	1.4	0.0	6.7	20.9	21.6	22.2	0.0	10.3
Personnel	0.0	8.3	0.0	2.6	6.7	2.3	3.9	2.8	0.0	2.5
Political groups, parties	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	2.3	2.0	5.6	4.5	1.9
<b>External affairs</b>										
HK-mainland affairs	0.0	0.0	34.2	0.0	0.0	4.7	15.7	13.9	0.0	12.5
HK-UK affairs	0.0	12.5	38.4	5.3	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.6
HK-overseas affairs	5.6	0.0	2.7	7.9	26.7	11.6	11.8	8.3	22.7	9.1
International affairs	0.0	4.2	5.5	2.6	13.3	7.0	3.9	2.8	31.8	6.6
Others	11.1	16.7	11.0	5.2	13.3	4.7	11.8	8.3	13.6	10.0
(N)	(18)	(24)	(73)	(38)	(15)	(43)	(51)	(36)	(22)	(320)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

For over a century, the colonial government had discouraged representative politics by using a model which appointed social elites as members or consultants of power centres. The introduction of elections to government councils and the broadening of the electoral franchise opened up more channels and greater opportunities for public political participation. Issues relating to voting and representation also stood out as the most frequent contending political problem. About a quarter of all the recorded political conflicts concerned these issues. Such contentions shot up prominently in 1987, 1988 and 1990.<sup>21</sup> In addition, 10.3 per cent of the conflicts of political nature were related to the issue of political reform. The majority of these events (84.8 per cent) occurred between 1992 and 1994.<sup>22</sup>

Hong Kong people are increasingly dependent on governmental intervention in a wide range of public and private affairs. The satisfactory performance of the local government has long been regarded as one of the major reasons for popular acceptance of the colonial regime. Yet, our series of social indicators surveys has also documented a trend of declining public satisfaction with government performance.<sup>23</sup> The proportion of respondents rating it as good has dropped significantly from 44.2 per cent in 1988 to 24.8 per cent in 1990, 21.8 per cent in 1993, and then 17.3 per cent in 1995. According to our records, collective actions pertaining to government performance and administration made up 10.9 per cent of the reported events. These conflicts were rather rare in the late 1980s. They increased significantly in 1992, stabilized in 1993 and 1994, and dropped considerably in 1995.

Problems concerning selection, recruitment and appointment of government personnel as well as political groups and parties were not a hot issue for collective actions. Each took up only 2.5 and 1.9 per cent, respectively, of the total recorded political conflicts.

On average, nearly four out of ten of our account of political conflicts pertained to external affairs. Of all, 12.5 per cent were related to Hong Kong-Mainland China affairs, 10.6 per cent to Hong Kong-United Kingdom affairs, 9.1 per cent to Hong Kong-

overseas affairs and 6.6 per cent to international affairs. The majority of social conflict events concerning the affairs with the United Kingdom<sup>24</sup> and Mainland China<sup>25</sup> took place in 1989.

### *Conflicts of Transport Nature*

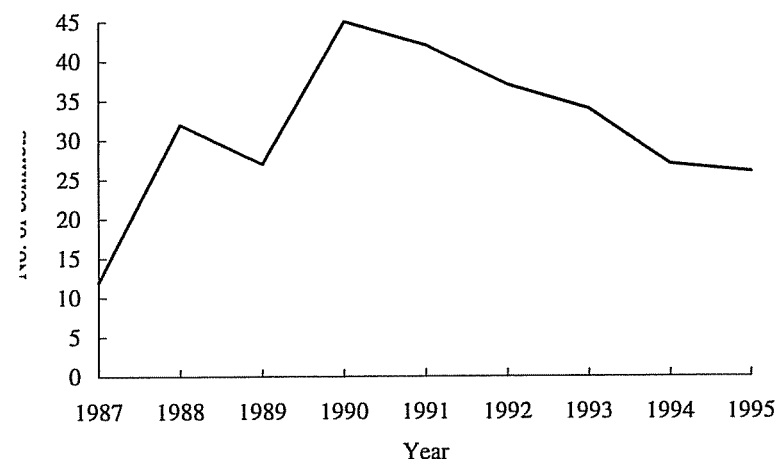
Transport supports all socio-economic activities that involve movement of passengers, delivery of service and goods. The availability and cost of transport affect directly the way and quality of life. In Hong Kong, the transport infrastructure and services are subject to enormous pressure from an extremely dense population and ever-growing socio-economic activities. Hence, the problem of transport has always been a major public concern. As revealed by our series of social indicators surveys, the proportions of respondents who did not regard transport as a serious social problem were 15.1 per cent in 1988, 19.6 per cent in 1990, 21.9 per cent in 1993, and 18.7 per cent in 1995.

Our collection of social conflict events recorded a total of 282 events related to issues of transport nature. Figure 6 illustrates the trend of these events from 1987 to 1995. It can be seen that, except for a rise in 1990 and 1991, the occurrence of social conflicts of transport nature fluctuated less than the four types of conflicts presented above. It also shows a downward trend in the 1990s.

As shown in Table 19, issues related to public transport services, such as buses, the five rail systems, taxis, minibuses and ferries, constituted the major base of collective actions of transport nature. Nearly six out of ten recorded conflicts belonged to this category — 22.0 per cent related to buses, 14.2 per cent to rails, 12.4 per cent to taxis, 5.0 per cent to ferries and 4.6 per cent to public light buses. The major issues of these conflicts were:

Fee	53.7 per cent
Provision	9.1 per cent
Standard	4.3 per cent
Others	32.9 per cent

figure 6 Trend of Conflict of Transport Nature, 1987-1995



About one-fifth of the transport-related conflicts was concerned with government regulations, policies, management and control on transport — 10.3 per cent on public transport and 8.9 per cent on private vehicles. Nearly half (48.3 per cent) of the collective actions concerning regulations on public transport happened in 1989 and 1990, while 36.0 per cent of actions on private vehicles occurred in 1993.

Contentious events relating to external traffic only accounted for 8.9 per cent of all the transport-related conflicts. Among them, 52.0 per cent were related to port and international shipping, 36.0 per cent to cross-border traffic, and 12.0 per cent to international airport and civil aviation. The continued expansion of the transport infrastructure is always a need. Issues concerning the infrastructure constituted 8.2 per cent of the total transport-related social conflicts. This kind of collective contention was more common in the 1990s than in the late 1980s and 30.4 per cent took place in 1991.

Table 19 Conflicts of Transport Nature, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Infrastructure</b>	8.3	6.3	0.0	6.7	16.7	5.4	11.8	0.0	15.4	8.2
<b>Government regulation</b>										
On public transport	16.7	9.4	29.6	13.3	4.8	5.4	8.8	3.7	7.7	10.3
On private vehicles	8.3	6.3	0.0	2.2	4.8	10.8	26.5	7.4	15.4	8.9
<b>Public transport services</b>										
Buses	8.3	12.5	14.8	37.8	16.7	13.5	0.0	55.6	34.6	22.0
Rails	8.3	37.5	18.5	0.0	28.6	8.1	20.6	0.0	0.0	14.2
Taxis	41.7	12.5	7.4	22.2	14.3	8.1	5.9	7.4	3.8	12.4
Ferries	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.9	0.0	24.3	2.9	0.0	0.0	5.0
Minibuses	0.0	0.0	22.2	6.7	2.4	2.7	0.0	7.4	0.0	4.6
<b>External traffic</b>	0.0	9.4	7.4	0.0	11.9	10.8	17.6	7.4	11.5	8.9
Others	8.3	6.3	0.0	2.2	0.0	10.8	5.9	11.1	11.5	5.7
(N)	(12)	(32)	(27)	(45)	(42)	(37)	(34)	(27)	(26)	(282)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

### Scope of Issue in Contention

As shown in Table 20, nearly nine out of ten contentious actions were within the scope of the territory. Social conflicts aimed at sectorial impact constituted the majority. Among these conflict events, except for a drop in 1991 (192 cases) and a rise in 1992 (316 cases), the trend over the period under study was rather stable.

Next in frequency were the collective actions directed at a territory-wide effect. On average, 17.9 per cent of the recorded conflict events belonged to this category. This kind of conflicts peaked in 1990 (150 cases), fluctuated at the level of 59-78 cases per year from 1991 to 1994, and then dropped to 43 cases in 1995.

Conflicts with a smaller territorial scope made up about one-tenth of the total conflicts — 2.5 per cent with a regional scope, 4.2 per cent a district scope and 3.5 per cent a vicinity scope. Over the years, collective actions with either a regional scope or a district scope experienced a fluctuating trend. In contrast, social conflicts with a vicinity scope appeared to rise in the 1990s.

About 12.9 per cent of all the recorded conflicts were outside the scope of Hong Kong. Among these contentious actions, the absolute majority (85.0 per cent) were aimed at China. This kind of conflict was literally non-existent before 1989, with only a total of six cases reported in 1987 and 1988. In 1989, contentious actions pertaining to China rose to 152 cases. On 11 July 1989, Jiang Zemin stated that, "according to the principle of 'one country, two systems,' China practises socialism, Hong Kong practises capitalism. The well water [Hong Kong] should not interfere with the river water [China]." Since 1990, conflicts directed at China had dropped significantly to a nadir in 1993 (20 cases) and then had risen again in 1994 and 1995 (60 and 42 cases, respectively).

Social conflicts with an overseas scope were rather infrequent and accounted for only 1.9 per cent of all the recorded events. Among them, 77.5 per cent occurred during 1989 and 1992.

Table 21 gives further details of the conflict events with a sectorial scope. It is clear that an individual's ascribed status, such as age and sex, was not a popular base for collective action. Of all



the recorded events, only 3.1 per cent were concerned with age, while 2.9 per cent related to gender. However, we observed that contentious events concerning age have risen steadily since 1992 onwards, while those concerning gender reached their peak in 1994.

About half of the recorded conflicts were related to the dimension of work. Among these events, 23.9 per cent were concerned with public employees, 7.5 per cent with professional workers and 55.3 per cent with other specific industry. Only 13.3 per cent pertained to the whole working population.

Collective actions confined to the scope of the housing sector constituted 13.6 per cent of the total conflicts. Percentages of social conflicts related to the sectors of consumer, student, political affiliation, class and religion ranged widely from 0.3 per cent (religion) to 9.0 per cent (students).

Table 22 presents a general picture of the nature of major issues in contention by the scope of issues. It shows that conflict related to "civil rights and liberties" was the only issue that targeted outside the territory. Issues that aimed at a territory-wide impact included mainly those pertaining to "politics and government," "public works and utilities," "economics" and "legal and judicial." Collective contentions with a regional, district or vicinity scope were mostly of "public work and utilities," "urban planning and development" and "environment" nature. As mentioned above, the majority of social conflicts were confined to certain sectors of the population. It is particularly true with respect to the issues of "labour and employment," "education," "urban services," "communication media" and "housing."

**Table 20** Scope of Major Issues in Contention, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Within Hong Kong</b>										
Territory-wide	19.0	13.7	17.9	29.5	18.4	14.3	14.1	19.3	11.9	17.9
Regional	1.0	2.2	3.2	2.0	1.1	3.7	0.7	5.9	2.2	2.5
District	4.0	7.8	1.9	3.9	7.3	2.4	5.7	2.7	4.1	4.2
Vicinity	3.0	5.0	1.1	1.4	3.4	2.6	5.3	5.7	6.1	3.5
Sectorial	70.7	69.3	44.6	48.7	53.6	68.4	67.5	51.0	62.2	58.4
<b>Outside Hong Kong</b>										
China-related	1.0	0.9	29.0	10.8	12.0	5.6	4.8	14.9	11.6	11.0
Overseas	0.3	1.2	1.9	3.5	3.9	2.8	1.0	0.0	1.9	1.9
Unknown	1.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	1.0	0.5	0.0	0.4
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 21** Area of Sectorial Conflicts, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Age	2.4	0.4	0.0	1.2	2.6	3.5	3.5	7.3	7.1	3.1
Gender	3.8	1.3	0.4	1.6	1.0	0.9	4.9	10.7	2.7	2.9
Work-related										
Public employees	9.0	20.6	12.0	10.9	16.7	9.2	17.3	8.3	4.4	12.0
Professionals	1.4	3.6	6.4	4.4	2.6	1.9	2.1	9.2	3.6	3.8
Other occupation, industry	42.5	27.3	31.2	37.1	25.0	21.2	21.9	19.9	27.6	27.9
Working population	7.1	4.5	9.8	8.1	4.2	6.0	7.4	2.4	9.8	6.7
Student	4.2	11.2	7.3	7.7	16.1	7.6	8.5	9.7	10.2	9.0
Consumer	8.0	6.3	0.9	0.4	4.7	2.5	1.8	2.4	1.8	3.0
Political affiliation	0.5	0.4	5.1	1.2	0.0	1.9	4.2	4.9	0.9	2.2
Class	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.8	2.1	1.6	0.7	0.5	0.0	0.7
Religion	0.0	0.4	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Property controlled, resident	5.7	2.7	0.4	6.5	7.8	15.2	11.7	4.9	10.7	7.7
Public housing	3.3	5.4	0.9	7.3	10.9	10.8	8.1	3.4	1.3	5.9
Others	11.8	15.7	24.8	12.1	6.3	17.4	7.8	16.5	20.0	14.8
(N)	(212)	(223)	(234)	(248)	(192)	(316)	(283)	(206)	(225)	(2,139)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 22** Issue in Contention by Scope (%)

	Within Hong Kong			Outside Hong Kong	(N)
	Territory-wide	Regional, district, vicinity	Sectorial		
Civil rights and liberties	15.9	0.2	17.3	66.7	(561)
Communication media	16.7	0.0	81.0	2.4	(42)
Culture and religion	10.3	27.9	45.6	16.2	(68)
Economics	42.8	9.2	48.0	0.0	(173)
Education	2.3	3.3	93.9	0.5	(214)
Environment	23.8	40.6	32.7	3.0	(101)
Health and medical services	29.1	7.6	63.3	0.0	(79)
Housing	5.6	20.8	73.3	0.3	(341)
Labour and employment	4.1	0.1	95.6	0.1	(753)
Legal and judicial	42.6	4.8	50.0	2.7	(188)
Police, military and public order	15.1	18.9	66.0	0.0	(53)
Politics and government	44.5	6.0	28.1	21.5	(317)
Public works and utilities	45.0	52.5	2.5	0.0	(40)
Social welfare	26.9	5.7	66.9	0.6	(175)
Transport	17.4	24.1	58.2	0.4	(282)
Urban planning and development	4.3	46.7	48.9	0.0	(92)
Urban services	2.9	11.8	85.3	0.0	(34)
Vietnamese boat people	19.2	24.2	51.7	5.0	(120)

### Major Objective

A conflict arises when contending parties believe that they have incompatible goals and that their goals are fully or partially attainable. Conflicting goals differ not only in the centrality of their attainment, but also in the effort needed for their realization. Therefore, in addition to the ultimate goals, there are always some strategic or immediate goals for attaining the ultimate goals or for building support for the contending parties. The present study recorded only the conflict objectives stated explicitly by the claim-making party and reported by the press.

As shown in Table 23, only a negligible number of social conflicts were of unknown objective (0.3 per cent), without any specific objective (0.2 per cent), or aimed at damaging or controlling object, place or person (0.1 per cent). Nearly half of the conflict events (50.8 per cent) aimed to protest against some specific objects; 40.0 per cent intended to demand something or some changes; 6.1 per cent were directed at the defence or support of person, group or workplace.

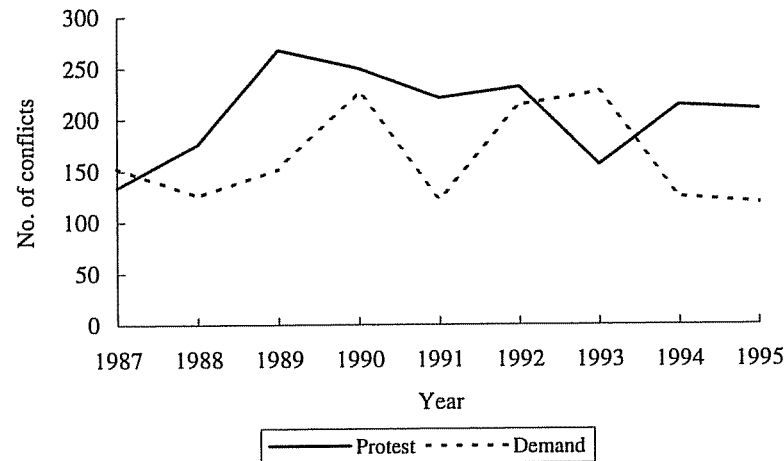
Figure 7 shows that social conflicts that aimed to protest or demand started at a similar level, with around 150 events in 1987, and then experienced a fluctuating but unparalleled development. Protest conflicts rose more rapidly and reached their peak in 1989. They dropped suddenly in 1993 but soon went back to their usual level of around 220 events per year. The frequency of demand conflicts was generally lower than that of protest. They occurred more often in 1990, 1992 and 1993 and less in 1988, 1991, 1994 and 1995.

Table 24 shows the breakdown of the protests by their specific object. The pattern is rather clear. Half of the protests were directed at certain laws, policies, policy proposals or their enforcement. Specifically, 18.3 per cent were protests against a law or a policy, 15.4 per cent against a policy proposal, 13.7 per cent against the enforcement of a law or a proposal, and 3.2 per cent against the Basic Law and its draft. Figure 8 portrays the oscillatory trends of these major objects of protest actions.

**Table 23** Major Objective of Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Apparently random	0.0	0.3	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.2
Damage or control of object, place, person	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.1
Protest	44.7	54.7	51.0	49.1	61.7	50.2	37.2	53.0	58.0	50.8
Demand	51.0	39.1	29.0	44.6	34.4	46.3	54.2	30.9	32.9	40.0
Defence or support of person, group or workplace	1.7	4.3	11.4	5.3	3.4	2.2	5.7	11.9	6.1	6.1
Others	2.0	1.6	7.4	1.0	0.6	0.6	1.9	3.2	2.2	2.4
Unknown	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.3
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Figure 7** Trends of Protest and Demand, 1987-1995

Over one-eighth of the recorded protest actions pertained to work-related issues — 3.9 per cent were concerned with employers' action, 8.4 per cent with various work conditions, and only 1 per cent with unemployment. Figure 9 gives the directions of their development. It is observed that protest against work conditions reached its peaks in 1989 and 1993 and declined significantly in 1995, the year with an uproar over employers' action as well as the problem of unemployment.

Collective actions against the state's repressive action accounted for 6.3 per cent of the recorded protests. Nearly 39.8 per cent happened in 1989 and another 32.2 per cent occurred in 1994 and 1995. Protests against actions of other person or party amounted to 15 per cent of the total number of protests. Over the years, this kind of protests wavered between 8 (1987) to 58 events (1992) a year. Protest over price constituted 6.8 per cent of the recorded events. It also showed a fluctuating trend over the years. About 22.0 per cent of these protests took place in 1990 and another 16.5 per cent in 1994. The lowest records were found in 1989

and 1987. Gender discrimination was never an issue in this regard. In nine years, only five collective actions with such objective were recorded.

Table 25 shows the breakdown of the demands by their specific object. About one-third of the demands was directed specifically at public policies — 25.2 per cent claimed for legislative or policy modification, 3.8 per cent for administrative or implementational modification, 2.9 per cent for policy implementation or enforcement, and 2.8 per cent for regulation or legislation. Figure 10 depicts the trends of these policy-related demands. It seems that different types of demands followed basically a similar contour — a rise in 1990, 1992 and 1993 and a decline in 1991 and 1995.

Another one-third of the recorded demands requested for certain actions — 20.4 per cent asked for provision or improvement, 8.3 per cent for compensation, 6.5 per cent for intervention, and 1 per cent for prevention. Figure 11 follows the development of these claims. Demands for prevention remained at a very low level and saw some increase in recent years. Frequency of demands for intervention was rather steady, except for a rise in 1992. Both demands for compensation and demands for provision and improvement started at a similar level. Demand for provision and improvement rose prominently in 1992, while demand for compensation also increased in 1993. For most of the years, the frequency of the former at least doubled that of the latter.

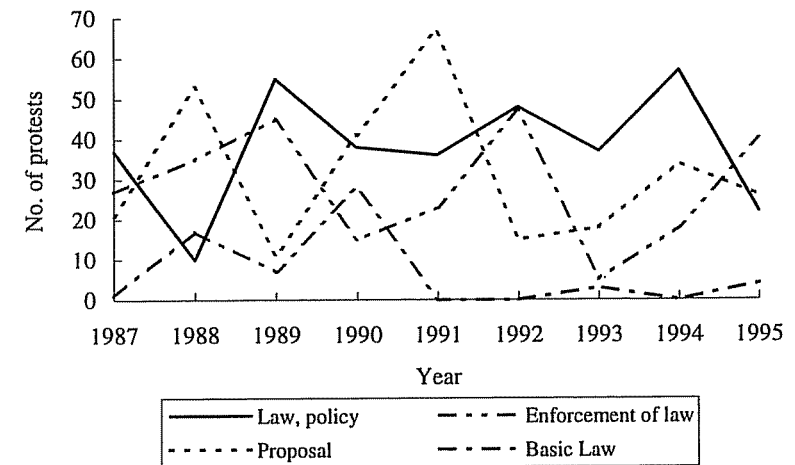
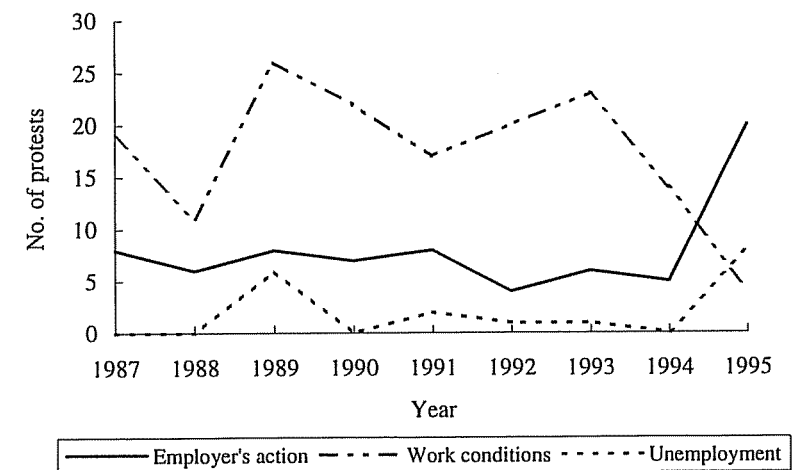
There was only a minority of events demanding for the disclosure of information (3.3 per cent), participation and consultation (2.2 per cent), and appointment, resignation, or dismissal of personnel (1.1 per cent). As shown in Figure 12, the trends of these requests fluctuated while the demands for the disclosure of information showed a downward tendency.

All the demands mentioned above were confined to local affairs. During the period under study, there was a number of demands which aimed at some responses from or some changes on the part of the Chinese government. These demands were classified into the category of "others."

**Table 24** Object of Protest, 1987-1995 (%)

Protest against	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Law, policy	27.6	5.7	20.5	15.2	16.3	20.7	23.7	26.6	10.5	18.3
Proposal	15.7	30.1	4.1	16.4	30.3	6.5	11.5	15.9	12.4	15.4
Enforcement of law, policy	20.1	19.9	16.8	6.0	10.4	20.3	3.2	8.4	19.0	13.7
Basic Law and its draft	0.7	9.7	2.6	11.2	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	1.9	3.2
Employer's action	6.0	3.4	3.0	2.8	3.6	1.7	3.8	2.3	9.5	3.9
Work condition	14.2	6.3	9.7	8.8	7.7	8.6	14.7	6.5	1.9	8.4
Unemployment	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.9	0.4	0.6	0.0	3.8	1.0
Repressive action	2.2	1.1	17.5	4.0	4.1	3.4	0.6	9.3	8.6	6.3
Other person, party	6.0	11.4	16.0	9.2	12.7	25.0	17.9	14.5	19.5	15.0
Price	4.5	7.4	1.5	11.2	7.7	6.9	8.3	9.8	4.3	6.8
Gender discrimination	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.3
Others	3.0	4.5	6.0	14.4	6.3	6.5	13.5	5.6	8.6	7.7
(N)	(134)	(176)	(268)	(250)	(221)	(232)	(156)	(214)	(210)	(1,861)

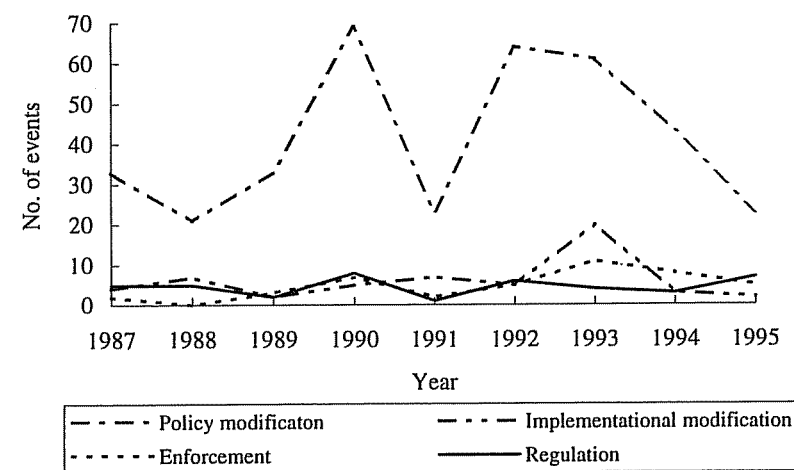
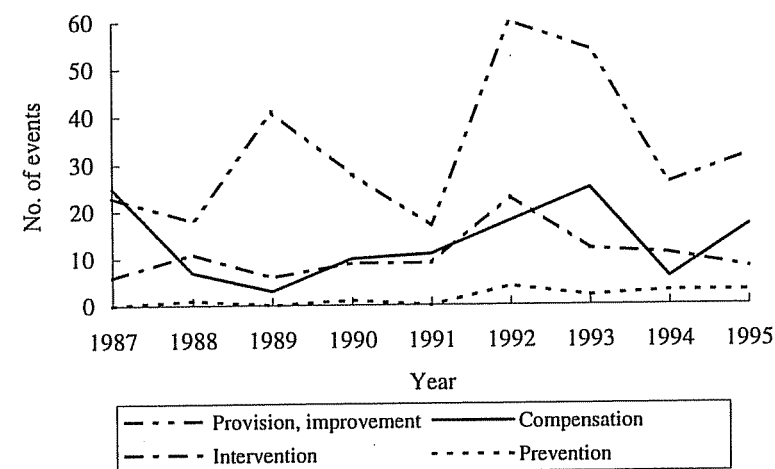
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

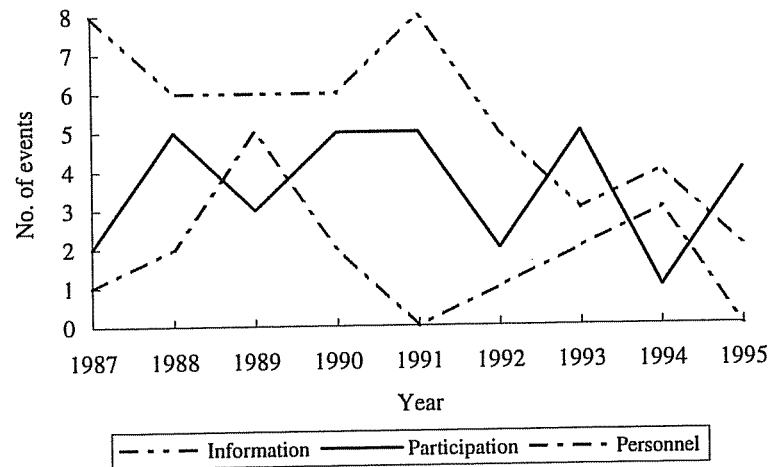
**Figure 8** Trends of Policy-related Protests, 1987-1995**Figure 9** Trends of Work-related Protests, 1987-1995

**Table 25** Major Object of Demand, 1987-1995 (%)

Demand for	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Legislative, policy modification	21.6	16.7	21.7	30.4	18.7	29.9	26.9	34.4	19.3	25.2
Administrative/Implementational modification	2.6	5.6	1.3	2.2	5.7	2.3	8.8	2.4	1.7	3.8
Policy implementation, enforcement	1.3	0.0	2.0	3.1	1.6	2.3	4.8	6.4	4.2	2.9
Regulation, legislation	3.3	4.0	1.3	3.5	0.8	2.8	1.8	2.4	5.9	2.8
Provision, improvement	15.0	14.3	27.0	12.3	13.8	28.0	23.8	20.8	26.9	20.4
Compensation	16.3	5.6	2.0	4.4	8.9	8.4	11.0	4.8	14.3	8.3
Intervention	3.9	8.7	3.9	4.0	7.3	10.7	5.3	8.8	6.7	6.5
Prevention	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.9	0.9	2.4	2.5	1.0
Disclosure of information	5.2	4.8	3.9	2.6	6.5	2.3	1.3	3.2	1.7	3.3
Participation, consultation	1.3	4.0	2.0	2.2	4.1	0.9	2.2	0.8	3.4	2.2
Appointment, resignation, dismissal of personnel	0.7	1.6	3.3	0.9	0.0	0.5	0.9	2.4	0.0	1.1
Others	28.8	34.1	31.6	33.9	32.5	9.8	12.3	11.2	13.4	22.6
(N)	(153)	(126)	(152)	(227)	(123)	(214)	(227)	(125)	(119)	(1,466)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Figure 10** Trends of Policy-related Demands, 1987-1995**Figure 11** Trends of Action-related Demands, 1987-1995

**Figure 12** Trends of Other Demands, 1987-1995

## Mode of Action

### General Pattern

How conflicting goals are pursued is probably the most visible manifestation of a social conflict. In the 1960s, the *Kowloon Disturbances 1966: Report of Commission of Inquiry* noted that: "There is evidence of a growing interest in Hong Kong on the part of youth and a tendency to protest at a situation which their parents might tacitly accept."<sup>26</sup> In the 1980s, the *Report from the Standing Committee on Pressure Groups* had already recognized the frequent occurrence of open protest actions, such as petitions, demonstrations, sit-ins and processions as a "normal way of life."<sup>27</sup>

In Hong Kong, organizers of public events are required to either notify the police or seek police permits. Table 26 shows the number of these applications from 1987 to 1995. Government records show that the number of applications for processions in

**Table 26** Number of Applications for Public Meetings and Processions

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Public meetings	92	176	207	365	977	827	1,026	1,383	1,112
Disallowed	3	3	2	4	—	—	—	—	—
Processions	172	199	290	272	257	309	290	394	401
Disallowed	2	5	3	4	—	—	—	—	—

Sources: 1987 to 1990: *South China Morning Post*, 17 March 1991, p. 2;  
1991 to 1995: The Royal Hong Kong Police Force.

1995 saw a jump of 133 per cent on that of 1987, the number of applications for public meeting 1,109 per cent, and the proportions of applications disallowed had been extremely low. It is clear that collective action has become a standard instrument of popular politics.

According to their degree of acceptance of the institutionalized channels set by the authorities, collective actions are classified into three broad categories: (1) persuasive action, (2) protest action and (3) violent action.<sup>28</sup> Table 27 summarizes how Hong Kong people pursued their goals through social conflict during the period of 1987 to 1995. Each conflict event may consist of more than one mode of action. In this study, we counted up to three actions per each event and a total of 4,201 actions was recorded.

In general, conflicting parties would strive to gain the support of the general public so as to generate social pressure on their adversaries. On the one hand, the degree of social acceptance of conflict action is critical to the mobilization of support from both the partisans and the community. It thus affects the ways the contending parties pursue their goals. On the other hand, the frequent occurrence of certain conflict action may in turn influence the public mind. The more it occurs, the more the public would take it. According to our 1993 social indicators survey,

Hong Kong people held distinct attitudes towards different modes of conflict actions. Respondents were asked to evaluate the radicalness of a list of collective actions. Table 28 summarizes the results. On the whole, about one-seventh of the respondents had no definite opinion in this regard. The degree of social acceptance of non-violent and self-confined action, such as a signature campaign, press conference, petition and sit-in, was relatively higher. The proportion of respondents who regarded these actions as not radical was larger than that of opposite views. Processions in Hong Kong were usually decorous. However, nearly four out of ten respondents still classified this mode of action as radical, in contrast to 21.1 per cent who thought otherwise. All of the non-cooperation actions listed, such as strike, school strike and driver strike, were considered by the absolute majority of respondent as radical. Violent action was particularly unacceptable.

Against this social context, we can observe in Table 27 that only 1.1 per cent of all the recorded social conflicts adopted violent action. Among them, 63.8 per cent happened between 1988 and 1990. The highest rate of violence was found in social conflict events relating to the Vietnamese boat people.

Notwithstanding the higher degree of social acceptance of persuasive action, claim-making parties were more inclined to use protest actions. On average, 35.9 per cent of collective contentions made use of persuasive actions to pursue their goals, as compared with 60.6 per cent that adopted protest actions. With respect to persuasive action, the most common mode was a press conference, followed by meeting, signature campaign and open letter. In regard to protest action, a petition was more popular than a demonstration. Very few social conflicts involved boycott action.

Figures 13 and 14 follow the changes of different modes of persuasive actions and protest actions. The frequency of the press conference rose abruptly in 1989, reached its nadir in 1991 and went back to a usual level of around 70 events a year. The occurrences of a signature campaign, open letter and meeting fluctuated within a rather narrow range. No decisive up or down could be observed. The mode of the demonstration was relatively infre-

**Table 27** Mode of Conflict Actions, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>Persuasive action</b>										
Gathering, meeting	14.4	13.7	8.0	7.5	7.7	11.0	14.5	8.1	10.6	10.2
Open letter	1.6	2.3	4.5	2.4	5.1	1.4	6.7	5.3	3.3	3.7
Press conference	22.6	17.8	22.6	14.4	9.9	14.6	16.1	15.2	15.7	16.4
Signature campaign	3.4	8.4	5.0	6.7	7.7	4.6	3.8	5.8	4.9	5.6
<b>Protest action</b>										
Boycott	0.3	1.3	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.9	0.7	0.6
Demonstration	10.7	18.8	28.9	19.6	27.3	22.2	21.9	28.2	24.9	23.0
Petition, appeal	40.8	33.8	26.8	43.8	41.1	44.8	34.2	31.6	36.2	37.0
<b>Violent action</b>										
Personal attack, violent confrontation	0.6	2.5	1.2	1.9	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.6	1.2	1.0
Riot	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.1
Others	5.6	1.5	2.3	2.9	0.2	0.8	2.0	4.3	2.3	2.4
(N)	(319)	(394)	(575)	(616)	(455)	(500)	(448)	(468)	(426)	(4,201)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.



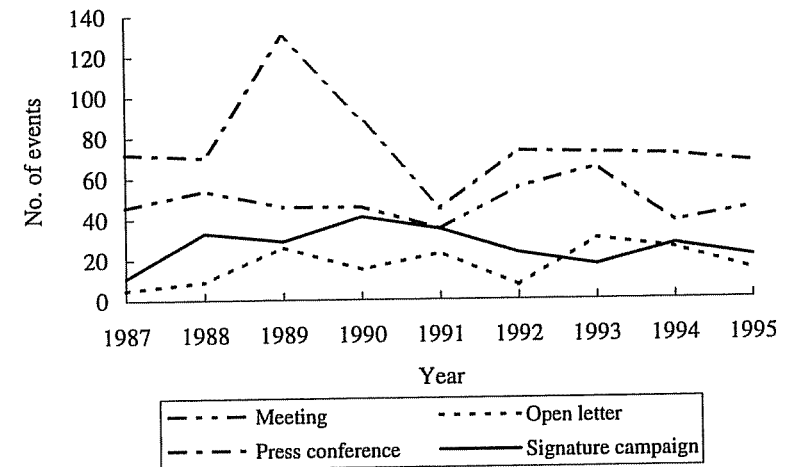
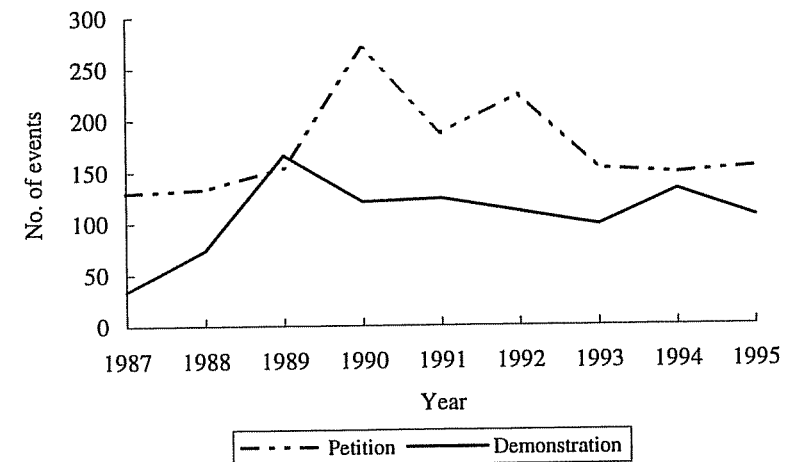
**Table 28** Perceived Radicalness of Conflict Actions, 1993 (%)

	Not radical	Average	Radical	Don't know
Signature campaign	52.0	25.8	8.9	13.4
Press conference	44.8	23.7	16.3	15.2
Petition	32.9	31.2	23.5	12.5
Sit-in	31.8	25.8	29.1	13.4
Procession	21.1	24.6	41.0	13.4
Hunger strike	11.9	9.2	65.3	13.7
School strike	7.7	11.0	65.2	16.1
Strike	6.2	10.7	67.6	15.5
Driver strike	5.0	10.1	70.3	14.6
Road blockage	3.3	5.3	78.1	13.4
Violence	2.1	1.8	81.9	14.3

(N = 337)

quent before 1989 — 34 cases in 1987 and 74 cases in 1988. The peak arrived in 1989 with a total of 166 cases. Since then, except for a decline in 1993, its frequency varied within the range of 110 to 130 cases per year. Petition was the most popular mode of conflict action. Except for two peaks in 1990 (270 cases) and 1992 (224 cases), its trend was also rather stable.

Excluding the infrequent violent actions, the five most popular issues in contention differ significantly in their mode of conflict action adopted. Comparatively speaking, it was most likely for issues pertaining to labour and employment to make use of persuasive action, followed by the transport-related issue, the political issue and the civil rights-related issue. Issues concerning housing were most inclined to resort to protest action. For example, while there were 77.1 per cent of housing-related social conflicts pursuing their goals by means of protest action, the corresponding percentage for labour-related conflict was 56.7 per cent — a difference of 20.4 percentage points (see Table 29).

**Figure 13** Trends of Persuasive Actions, 1987-1995**Figure 14** Trends of Protest Actions, 1987-1995

**Table 29** Major Issues in Contention by Mode of Action (%)

	Persuasive action	Protest action	(N)
Labour and employment	43.3	56.7	(843)
Transport	40.2	59.8	(306)
Politics and government	37.4	62.6	(353)
Civil rights	29.6	70.4	(625)
Housing	22.9	77.1	(376)

### Target of Petition

During 1987 and 1995, nearly four out of ten of the recorded social conflicts adopted the petition to articulate their grievance or demand. As shown in Table 30, the state was unmistakably the most popular target of petition. In Hong Kong, lawmaking power, for the most part, is highly centralized and rests with the Governor and senior government bureaucrats. On average, 24.3 per cent of all the petitions were directed at the Governor, another 21.0 per cent at various government departments or officials. The main function of the Executive Council (Exco), the highest body in central government, is to advise the Governor on all important matters of policy. It also has the power to make subsidiary legislation under a number of ordinances. However, since the entire Exco is appointed to office by the Governor, its proceedings are confidential; the Council is collectively responsible for the decisions made by the Governor in Council and has therefore never been a popular target of petition.

Hong Kong operates a three-tier system of representative government — the Legco at the central level; the Urban Council (Urbco) and the Regional Council (Regco) at the regional level; and District Boards (DBs) at the district level. The major functions of the Legco are the enactment of legislation, the control of public funds and the formulation of questions to the government on matters of public interest. Direct election to Legco was introduced

in 1991 and 30 per cent of its member were returned through popular vote. The Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (OMELCO) advises on public policy, considers complaints from the public and monitors the effectiveness of public administration. On the whole, petitions to the Legco and the OMELCO accounted for 30.6 per cent of the total records.

The Urbco and the Regco are statutory councils with responsibilities for the provisions of municipal services to people in the urban areas and the New Territories, respectively. The major function of the DBs is only to provide a forum for public consultation. About 38 per cent of the Urbco members, 33 per cent of the Regco members and two-thirds of the DB members were returned through direct election. Nonetheless, these bodies had rarely been regarded as a target of petition.

About one-tenth of all the petitions were targeted at the NCNA and another 5.8 per cent at authority outside Hong Kong. Figure 15 presents the trends of petitions targeted at the Governor, the Legco and OMELCO, government departments and officials, as well as the NCNA from 1987 to 1995. It seems that, since the introduction of direct election to Legco in 1991, the role of OMELCO in receiving public complaints had greatly diminished. The Legco might have become a popular arena for political struggle, but it was no longer the top priority for petition. Except for a decline in 1989, the frequency of petition to the Legco and the OMELCO remained fairly high from 1987 to 1992. After a significant fall in 1993, it stayed at a rather low level. Petition to the NCNA was very infrequent before 1989. It rose suddenly in 1989 and dropped gradually from 1990 to 1993. Since 1994 onwards, the NCNA had again become a popular petition target. Petition to the Governor was not a common phenomenon in the late 1980s. This kind of petition rose steadily and reached its peak in 1992. Despite a decline in 1994, it remained a rather popular choice for the articulation of grievances and demands. The frequency of petition to government departments and officials shot up in 1990. It experienced a fluctuating and downwards trend until a rise in 1995.

**Table 30** Target of Petition, 1987-1995 (%)

Petition to	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Governor	15.4	20.3	22.1	19.6	20.9	29.0	39.9	26.4	25.3	24.3
Government department, official	20.8	15.0	10.4	21.9	21.4	23.2	28.1	18.2	27.3	21.0
Executive Council	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.9	1.3	2.0	3.2	0.9
Legislative Council, OMELCO	53.8	51.9	27.9	31.9	40.6	33.0	15.7	13.5	8.4	30.6
Urban Council	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.3
Regional Council	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
District Board	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
New China News Agency	3.1	3.0	20.1	9.6	9.1	4.5	3.3	20.3	18.2	10.0
Authority outside HK	3.1	3.8	11.7	7.0	3.2	4.0	5.2	4.7	9.1	5.8
Threat of petition	0.8	2.3	0.6	0.7	1.6	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.0	1.0
Others	3.1	3.0	5.8	8.9	3.2	3.6	4.6	14.9	8.4	6.2
(N)	(130)	(133)	(154)	(270)	(187)	(224)	(153)	(148)	(154)	(1,553)

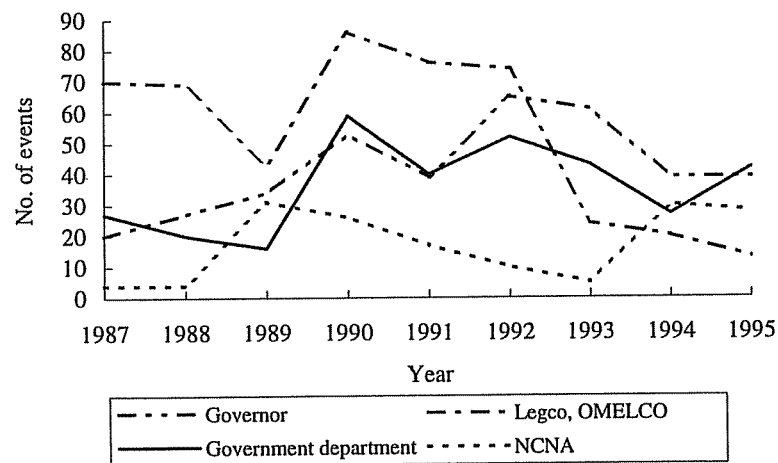
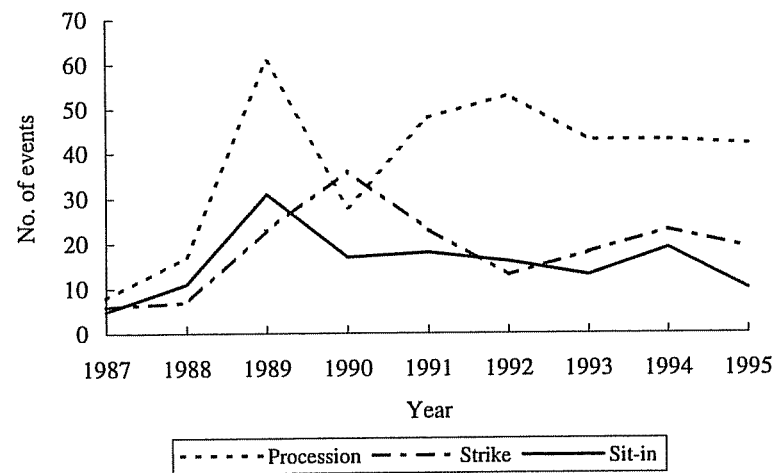
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

### Mode of Demonstration

The degree of social acceptance of demonstration is lower than that of petition. However, more aggressive conflict action generally enjoys a higher social exposure and, thus, exercises greater pressure for the adversary party to respond. As mentioned above, our survey findings in 1993 revealed that the degree of social acceptance of various modes of demonstration in descending order are: sit-in, procession, hunger strike, school strike, industrial strike, driver strike, road blockage and violence. The proportion of respondents who regarded such actions as radical ranged widely from 29.1 per cent to 81.9 per cent.

Table 31 shows the distribution of modes of demonstrations recorded over the period of 1987 to 1995. Mass procession and ceremony accounted for 35.5 per cent of all the recorded demonstrations. Act of economic non-cooperation, such as strike, industrial action and walkout, came second with 17.4 per cent. However, school strike was never a common phenomenon. Sit-in was the third extensively used action that made up 14.5 per cent of the total. Other social non-cooperation actions, such as driver strike and road blockage, constituted less than one-tenth of our account of demonstrations — 5.8 per cent for the former and 1.7 per cent for the latter. The self-inflicting action of hunger strike also amounted to 5.8 per cent.

Figure 16 portrays the changes in the three most popular modes of demonstration. Procession had a sharp increase in 1989 and then a drop in 1990. Yet, since 1991 onwards, the trend has remained on a high and stable level, with around 45 reported cases per year. Sit-in followed basically the contour of procession. The temporal pattern of industrial strike was different from that of procession and sit-in. This kind of demonstration was also quite infrequent in the late 1980s. Its peak arrived in 1990 and then declined to another bottom in 1992. Recent years saw a slight increase of such action.

**Figure 15** Selected Targets of Petition, 1987-1995**Figure 16** Selected Modes of Demonstration, 1987-1995**Table 31** Mode of Demonstration, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Mass procession, ceremony	23.5	23.0	36.7	23.1	38.7	47.7	43.9	32.6	39.6	35.5
Strike, industrial action, walkout	17.6	9.5	13.9	29.8	18.5	11.7	18.4	17.4	17.9	17.4
Sit-in	14.7	14.9	18.7	14.0	14.5	14.4	13.3	14.4	9.4	14.5
Driver strike	8.8	1.4	6.0	7.4	4.0	8.1	7.1	4.5	5.7	5.8
Hunger strike	2.9	20.3	6.6	4.1	4.8	0.0	4.1	6.1	5.7	5.8
Road blockage	0.0	2.7	1.2	2.5	1.6	0.9	1.0	3.0	0.9	1.7
School strike	0.0	2.7	1.2	2.5	0.8	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.9
Threat of demonstration	23.5	16.2	3.6	9.1	4.0	1.8	0.0	2.3	0.9	5.0
Others	8.8	9.5	12.0	7.4	12.9	15.3	11.2	19.7	19.8	13.5
(N)	(34)	(74)	(166)	(121)	(124)	(111)	(98)	(132)	(106)	(966)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

### *Parties in Contention*

Parties in contention are classified into three types: (1) claim-making party, (2) target party and (3) third party. Their basic characteristics are presented as follows.

#### **Claim-making Party**

In general, claims are expectations and demands to gain desired status, power, resources or other values from others. The claim-making party is thus a distinguishable group of people who articulate claims on a real target outside their own group. As mentioned above, while the presence of an independent party and antagonistic party in our sample of social conflicts had been rather rare, about two out of ten claim-making parties took part in the conflict with at least one alignment (see Table 7). The number of all claim-making parties involved in each conflict was counted. In recording the organizational feature of these parties, we only identified up to five parties per each event. According to our account, individual conflict event with more than five allies constituted less than one-tenth of the total conflicts. The problem of undercount can thus be estimated accordingly.

This section looks into the prior organization of the claim-making party, the social background of its initiators and participants, and the involvement of members of representative institutions.

#### *Prior Organization of Claim-making Party*

The crucial role of resources in the emergence and development of social conflict is well-documented. The ability of aggrieved people in mobilizing their resources has a direct impact on the conflict goal they form as well as the outcome of the contention. In this study, the prior organization of a claim-making party is classified into three broad types: (1) no prior organization, (2) emergent conflict group and (3) continuously organized group. A continuously organized group is further classified according to its organizational nature. A continuously organized group usually has a

mobilization advantage over an emergent conflict group and a loose group of individuals.

A total of 6,092 claim-making parties were identified from 3,661 conflict events. Table 32 outlines the profile of these parties and their changes over the span of 1987 to 1995. Of all the recorded claim-making parties, 12.8 per cent lacked sufficient information for us to identify their organizational nature. This was particularly more prevailing in 1994 and 1995.

On the whole, claim-making parties which did not exist as an organized entity before the conflict made up 15.0 per cent of our account. Emergent conflict groups, such as single issue standing groups, spontaneously formed groups and joint committee of groups, constituted only 6.3 per cent of the record.

About 64.2 per cent of the recorded claim-making parties were established associations before the conflict, with a majority of labour unions and professional groups. The second largest were political parties, political groups and pressure groups. Community associations also played an important role in making claims, followed by student associations and religious associations. Other associations of a trade, ethnic or welfare nature were not especially active in organizing collective contentions.

Figure 17 traces the patterns of and changes in the four most active groups from 1987 to 1995. The participation of political groups was different from that of community associations, labour unions and student associations. While the participation of the latter all reached their peak in 1989 and followed by a downward trend, that of the former was still on an upward trend in the early 1990s.

#### *Social Background of Participants*

In collective actions, people are probably the most fundamental resources to be mobilized. People with similar socio-demographic background are more likely to have similar social situation and grievances. Such social cleavage constitutes the underlying condition for the sense of solidarity and collective identity that are indispensable to any collective struggle. Some social cleavages are

Table 32 Prior Organization of Claim-making Party, 1987-1995 (%)

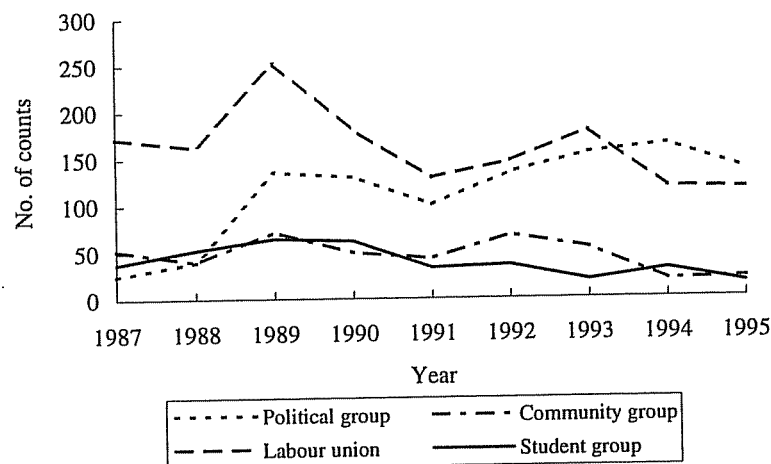
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
<b>No prior organization</b>	10.8	18.7	15.6	12.4	15.8	17.5	15.1	11.6	17.9	15.0
<b>Emergent conflict group</b>										
Single issue standing group,	3.2	2.2	1.9	3.2	2.5	4.1	2.8	6.9	4.9	3.5
spontaneously formed group										
Joint committee of groups	4.5	2.2	2.3	5.2	4.1	2.4	2.2	1.4	1.2	2.8
<b>Continuously organized group</b>										
Political party, political/ pressure group	4.5	7.2	14.9	16.2	17.8	17.9	23.1	23.6	23.1	16.7
Union, professional association	30.8	29.1	27.8	22.6	22.9	19.5	26.7	17.0	19.6	23.9
Trade association	2.0	2.0	1.3	4.1	2.8	2.0	0.4	0.3	0.8	1.8
Primary sector association	1.4	1.3	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.4
Community association	9.5	7.2	7.9	6.2	7.6	9.1	8.0	2.7	3.5	6.9
Ethnic association	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Religious association	5.2	3.4	6.7	8.5	5.9	2.5	1.5	2.3	1.3	4.3
Student association	6.8	9.5	7.2	7.7	5.9	4.8	2.8	4.5	2.7	5.8

Table 32 Prior Organization of Claim-making Party, 1987-1995 (%) (Continued)

Welfare association	1.3	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.5
Other sectoral group <sup>(1)</sup>	6.6	2.3	2.5	2.9	4.4	4.1	3.7	6.5	2.0	3.8
Others	4.1	2.7	1.0	0.9	1.8	1.9	0.6	1.9	1.3	1.7
Unknown	9.3	12.0	10.0	9.5	7.6	13.3	12.4	20.5	21.4	12.8
(N)	(558)	(557)	(906)	(801)	(563)	(747)	(671)	(696)	(593)	(6,092)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.  
 (1) For example, women association, youth association.

**Figure 17** Trends of Participation of Labour Union, Political, Community and Student Group as Claim-making Party, 1987-1995



based on established divisions, such as union vs. boss and people vs. state. People within the same category can be easily mobilized to advance their interests collectively. Some cleavages are based on less-defined and less-articulated divisions, such as age, sex and life style. These quasi-groups have socially recognized distinctions but, generally, have no established organization to represent them in conflict. Without collective identity, discontented persons may just voice their grievance or advance their interests individually but not expend their resources in participating in a collection action. How to mobilize these quasi-groups into self-conscious contending groups is an important issue in every social conflict. It is assumed that the homogeneity of members in a social category and its degree of organization are conducive to group solidarity and, thus, facilitate the mobilization of resources. This section focusses on the socio-occupational and organizational backgrounds of the initiators and the participants.

### Initiators

Table 33 gives the distribution of the major socio-occupational background of the individual initiators. Social conflicts initiated by named associations were excluded from this section's analysis. It is very clear that members of the representative institutions, namely, the Legco, the municipal councils and the DBs, stood out as the most active category. They made up 23.7 per cent of all the identifiable individual initiators. Following them were production workers and transport equipment operators. This group of manual workers constituted 15.4 per cent of our account of initiators. Students came third and took up another 12.6 per cent of the total record. The trends of the participation of these three groups of persons are presented in Figure 18. Except for the rises in the participation of members of representative institutions in 1988 and 1994, their overall patterns were quite similar. Significant increases were found in 1989 and 1992, while the major decrease was met in 1990.

Government officials and foreign citizens, such as Vietnamese boat people, each accounted for 6 to 7 per cent of the total number of individual initiators. The participation of government official was more common in recent years. Nearly half (48.5 per cent) of their involvement took place in 1994 and 1995. The participation of foreign citizens shot up in 1989 and made up 48.3 per cent of their total engagement.

The involvement of teachers, businessmen, professional workers as well as journalists as individual initiators was not common. They each took up only 3 to 5 per cent of the total account.

In many societies, liberal intellectuals have often been a leading force in social reforms and social movements. The case in Hong Kong was considerably different. The overall involvement of intellectuals, writers, artists and musicians as individual initiators of social contention was absolutely negligible.

Table 33 Major Socio-occupational Background of Initiators, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Agricultural/Animal husbandry worker, fisherman	3.8	5.5	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.7	1.5	0.0	2.1
Production worker, transport equipment operator	23.1	12.7	13.3	8.0	12.5	23.1	22.6	10.6	13.6	15.4
Sales/Service/Clerical worker	5.8	1.8	0.0	8.0	0.0	3.8	9.7	3.0	5.1	3.4
Social worker	3.8	0.0	1.9	8.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.5
Educational – teacher	3.8	3.6	3.8	4.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	7.6	5.1	3.8
Educational – student	13.5	5.5	12.4	20.0	16.7	15.4	22.6	7.6	11.9	12.6
Businessman, shopkeeper, proprietor	1.9	12.7	1.9	8.0	0.0	1.9	3.2	0.0	6.8	3.8
Intellectual, artist, writer, musician	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	3.4	0.9
Government official	5.8	0.0	5.7	8.0	0.0	11.5	0.0	15.2	10.2	7.0
Other professional, technical and related worker	3.8	5.5	5.7	4.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	7.6	6.8	4.7
Journalist	7.7	0.0	4.8	0.0	4.2	1.9	0.0	12.1	3.4	4.5
Religion	0.0	1.8	3.8	0.0	4.2	1.9	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.7
Ethnic minority	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4

Table 33 Major Socio-occupational Background of Initiators, 1987-1995 (%) (Continued)

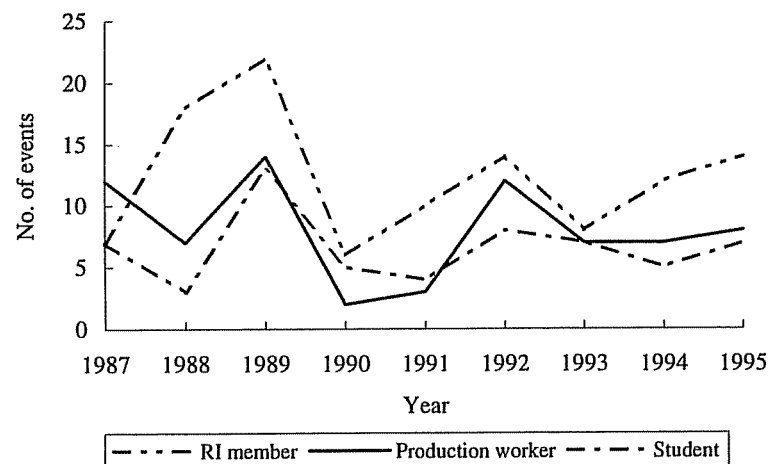
Foreign citizen, e.g., Vietnamese	0.0	7.3	13.3	4.0	8.3	3.8	0.0	3.0	6.8	6.2
Member of representative institution	13.5	32.7	21.0	24.0	41.7	26.9	25.8	18.2	23.7	23.7
Others	13.5	10.9	10.5	4.0	12.5	3.8	3.2	9.1	3.4	8.3
(N)	(52)	(55)	(105)	(25)	(24)	(52)	(31)	(66)	(59)	(469)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Conflict events with no initiator (15 cases) or initiated by named associations (2,574 cases) are excluded.



**Figure 18** Trends of Participation of Members of Representative Institutions, Production Workers and Students as Initiators, 1987-1995



Over the years under study, only two initiators whose salient social status was ethnic minority were reported in 1992. No event was found to be initiated by administrative workers, managerial workers, the police or the military.

Table 34 presents the major organizational background of both individual initiators and group initiators. Of all, only a minuscule number of events was identified as having no initiator. Events with insufficient information amounted to 19.8 per cent of the total record.

As expected, political groups and pressure groups were most active in organizing collective actions. About a quarter of all the recorded social conflicts were backed by them. Labour unions and professional groups also played a prominent role. About 22.6 per cent of our account of contentious events were identified as initiated by persons or groups of such nature. Residential groups and

community groups were the third largest category and took up 9.2 per cent of the conflict events reported. Figure 19 follows their trends from 1987 to 1995. Conflicts initiated by labour unions and student associations both reached their peak in 1989. Collective actions organized by political groups or pressure groups were rather infrequent before 1989. This kind of events rose significantly in 1989, decreased slowly in 1990 and 1991, then witnessed its peak in 1994.

Other organizations, such as trade associations, teacher associations, religious associations, consumer associations and international associations, were of lesser importance in this respect. It should be noted that about one-tenth of all the recorded conflicts were identified as initiated by persons or groups of a mixture of organizational background.

### Participants

Tables 35 to 37 summarize the background of the participants with respect to their occupation, industry and organizational affiliation. It is obvious that we can only get a glimpse of the picture by means of newspaper reports. As shown in the tables, the proportion of events with insufficient information ranges from one-sixth (15.8 per cent for organizational background) to one-third (30.9 per cent for occupation and 31.2 per cent for industry) of all the recorded social conflicts.

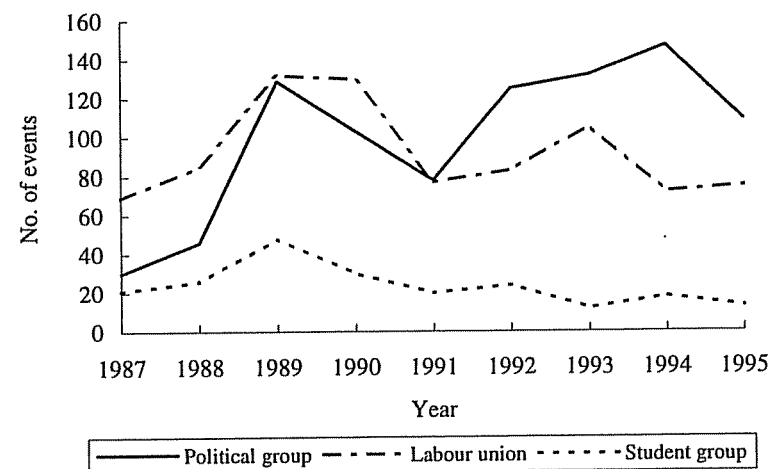
According to the available data, participants in many collective actions came from different occupations, industries or organizations. The respective proportions were 25.8, 27.3 and 30.5 per cent. We observed that such situation was particularly more prevailing after 1989 and 1990. It suggests that the social background of social conflict participants was getting more heterogeneous in the 1990s.

Some categories of people were found to be more actively involved in collective contentions. In regard to occupation, production workers, students and government officials tended to participate more often in social actions. They each made up 6.5, 6.1 and 5.9 per cent, respectively, of our account of social conflict

**Table 34** Major Organizational Background of Initiators, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No initiator	0.7	0.9	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.4
Primary sector association	2.7	0.9	0.4	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.7	1.0	0.0	0.7
Trade association	5.0	1.9	2.1	3.7	3.9	1.9	1.0	1.2	2.8	2.5
Labour union, professional group	23.0	26.4	25.1	25.5	21.5	18.0	25.1	17.8	20.7	22.6
Teacher association	1.3	0.9	1.3	0.4	2.0	2.4	1.0	0.0	0.6	1.1
Student association	7.0	8.1	9.1	5.9	5.6	5.2	2.9	4.5	3.6	5.8
Religious association	3.3	1.9	3.6	4.1	2.5	1.9	0.7	1.7	0.8	2.4
Welfare association	1.3	0.3	0.6	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.6
Residential/Community group	13.7	10.9	5.9	9.2	9.2	11.0	10.3	7.4	6.6	9.2
Consumer group	5.0	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.6	1.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.8
Political/Pressure group	10.0	14.3	24.6	20.2	21.8	27.1	31.5	36.4	30.1	24.6
International organization	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	1.0	0.6	0.3
Mixture of organization	12.7	7.5	6.1	8.4	9.5	10.0	8.1	10.4	12.7	9.3
Unknown	14.0	25.8	20.2	20.2	20.7	20.6	17.7	17.6	21.3	19.8
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Figure 19** Trends of Participation of Labour Union, Political and Student Group as Initiators, 1987-1995

events (see Table 35). The trends of their participation are given in Figure 20. While the largest numbers of collective actions with production workers and students as major participants were recorded in 1989, action with government officials was seen in 1993. After 1989, the number of social conflicts with substantial participation from students was obviously on a downward trend.

With respect to industry, people from the service industry and the transport, storage, and communication industry stood out to be the most active categories. About 14.9 per cent of the recorded social conflict events were joined mostly by workers from the community, social and personal service sectors, and 7 per cent from the transport, storage and communication sector (see Table 36). As shown in Figure 21, their participation in collective contentions also peaked in 1989 and 1990. Social conflicts with workers from other single industry as primary participants were rather infrequent.

**Table 35** Major Socio-occupational Background of Participants, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No distinct category	10.3	10.9	17.7	29.3	29.9	32.0	29.8	33.4	33.1	25.8
Agricultural/Animal husbandry worker, fisherman	3.7	1.6	1.0	0.2	1.1	0.2	2.1	1.5	0.0	1.1
Production worker, transport equipment operator	7.0	7.1	10.3	5.9	5.9	8.4	5.5	3.0	3.9	6.5
Sales/Service/Clerical worker	1.3	0.9	0.4	1.6	1.7	0.6	3.8	0.7	3.3	1.6
Social worker	1.7	0.0	0.8	1.6	2.2	2.2	0.5	0.7	0.3	1.1
Educational – teacher	2.0	3.1	1.5	1.8	4.5	2.6	1.9	4.0	4.4	2.8
Educational – student	4.7	7.1	8.6	7.1	7.8	4.8	4.8	5.4	3.6	6.1
Businessman, shopkeeper, proprietor	4.0	5.0	1.0	1.4	2.5	1.5	1.4	0.5	1.9	1.9
Intellectual, artist, writer, musician	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.6	0.2
Government official	5.7	9.0	4.4	6.3	5.3	5.4	10.7	4.0	2.5	5.9
Other professional, technical and related worker	3.7	6.8	5.5	2.4	1.4	0.9	0.5	2.7	1.7	2.8
Journalist	4.3	0.3	2.7	0.8	0.3	1.1	0.7	3.7	1.4	1.7

**Table 35** Major Socio-occupational Background of Participants, 1987-1995 (%) (Continued)

Religion	1.0	0.3	2.7	1.4	0.8	0.4	0.2	1.0	0.3	1.0
Ethnic minority	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Foreign citizen, e.g., Vietnamese	0.3	1.2	3.2	1.2	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.2	1.7	1.1
Member of representative institution	1.0	4.3	3.0	3.1	2.0	2.4	1.4	3.2	5.0	2.8
Others	7.0	7.5	5.1	7.1	5.0	6.5	4.8	5.7	13.3	6.7
Unknown	41.7	34.8	31.8	29.1	29.1	29.9	31.7	29.7	23.2	30.9
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 36** Major Industrial Group of Participants, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No distinct category	10.0	13.0	22.1	31.0	30.7	32.0	32.5	34.4	33.1	27.3
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	4.0	1.9	1.0	0.2	1.7	0.9	2.1	1.5	0.0	1.3
Manufacturing	1.3	2.2	1.3	2.0	2.5	2.8	0.7	0.0	0.3	1.5
Construction	1.0	3.1	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.7	1.7	0.8
Wholesale and retail trade, restaurant, hotel	1.0	3.1	1.0	0.2	0.3	0.9	1.0	0.5	1.9	1.0
Transport, storage, communication	11.7	4.3	10.1	5.9	5.6	5.6	7.6	6.4	5.2	7.0
Finance, insurance, real estate, business services	0.3	0.0	0.4	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3
Services	15.0	24.8	13.9	17.7	17.3	12.8	15.3	9.7	9.7	14.9
Students	4.7	7.1	8.4	7.5	7.3	5.0	4.8	4.5	3.9	6.0
Others	6.3	0.9	3.8	1.0	1.4	2.4	1.7	6.4	8.6	3.5
Mixture of categories	4.7	6.2	4.8	4.5	3.9	4.8	3.6	5.2	10.2	5.2
Unknown	40.0	33.2	32.8	28.9	29.1	32.3	30.1	30.7	25.4	31.2
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

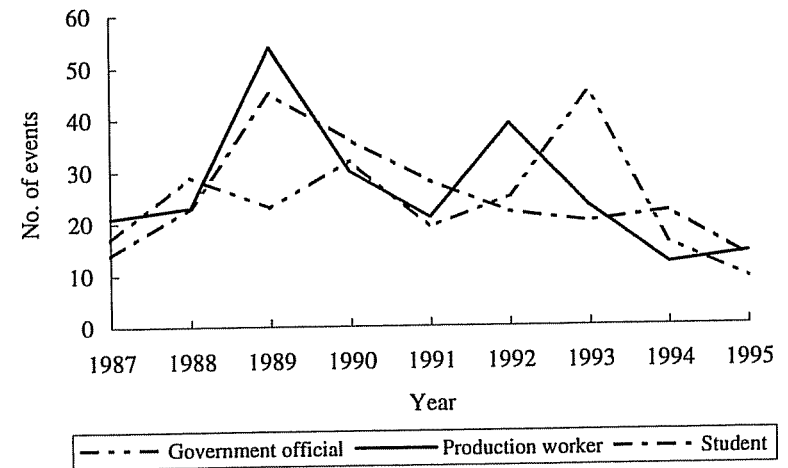
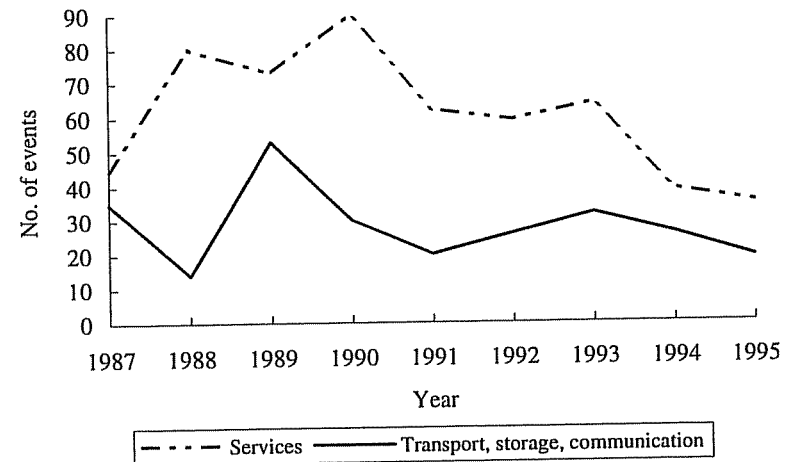
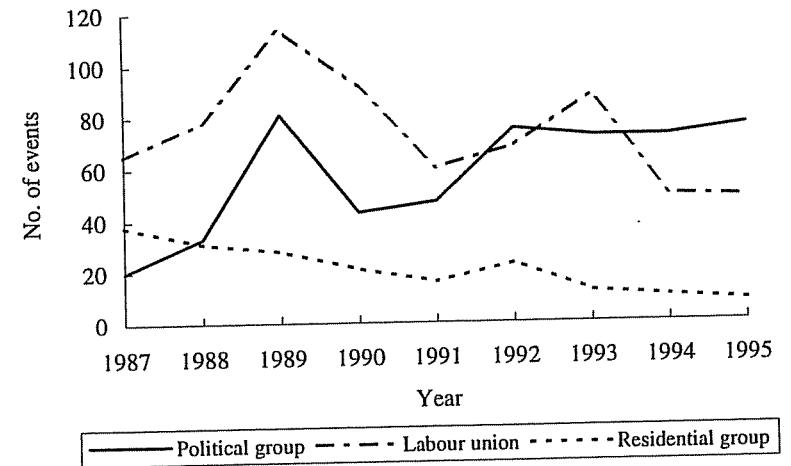
**Figure 20** Trends of Participation by Production Workers, Students and Government Officials, 1987-1995**Figure 21** Trends of Participation by Major Industrial Groups, 1987-1995

Table 37 shows the major organizational background of the social conflict participants. Apparently, people from labour unions, professional groups, political groups and pressure groups were particularly active in social conflict events. Of all our account of collective contentions, 18.1 per cent were taken up mainly by people from labour unions and professional groups, while another 14.2 per cent by those from political groups and pressure groups. Residential and community groups came third and made up 5.1 per cent of our collection of social conflicts. Figure 22 portrays the trends of their engagement in conflict events. Collective actions taken up mainly by residential and community group members have been on slow decline since 1987. Those joined largely by labour union members and professional group members reached their peak in 1989. Except for a second rise in 1993, this kind of conflict remained at a rather stable level throughout the period under study. The participation of political group members and pressure group members in social conflicts was significantly different from other social categories. While social conflicts involving predominantly other social categories generally underwent a decline in recent years, those engaging mainly political group members have experienced a steady rise since 1990. As a matter of fact, this was in line with the salient development of political parties in the early 1990s.

If we confine our analysis to the participation of the three most active groups (i.e., production workers, students and government officials) in the five most frequent conflict issues (i.e., labour and employment, civil rights and liberties, housing, politics and government, and transport), the inter-group differences are notably obvious. Social conflicts joined mainly by production workers were more likely to focus on labour and employment issues and transport issues. Students were more inclined to participate in conflicts related to civil rights and liberties. They were also more willing to take part in collective action of a political and government nature than production workers and government officials. The labour and employment issue was noted to be the only

**Figure 22** Trends of Participation by Labour Unions, Political and Residential Groups, 1987-1995



cause for the collective participation of government officials (see Table 38).

#### *Involvement of Members of Representative Institutions*

Members of representative institutions, i.e., the Legco, the Urbco, the Regco and the DBs, may be involved in social conflict as partisans of the claim-making party, mediators between the contending parties, or representatives of the target party. This section only takes into account their involvement as initiators or participants of the claim-making party. Regardless of other possible contributions, the sheer participation of these political leaders helps raise the attention of the media and the general public as well as the responsiveness of the target party.

**Table 37** Major Organizational Background of Participants, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No distinct background	20.3	23.0	22.9	33.2	36.0	32.9	31.0	38.1	35.1	30.5
Primary sector association	2.0	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.7	1.0	0.0	0.6
Trade association	0.7	0.6	0.2	2.9	2.0	0.9	0.2	0.5	1.4	1.1
Labour union, professional group	21.7	24.2	21.7	18.1	16.8	14.7	21.0	12.1	13.3	18.1
Teacher association	1.3	0.9	1.1	0.4	1.7	1.9	1.0	0.0	0.6	1.0
Student association	5.0	6.5	7.4	4.3	5.3	4.5	3.1	2.7	3.0	4.7
Religious association	2.7	1.2	2.5	2.9	1.7	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	1.6
Welfare association	1.0	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3
Residential/Community group	12.7	9.6	5.3	4.1	4.5	5.0	2.9	2.5	2.2	5.1
Consumer group	4.0	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.7
Political/Pressure group	6.7	10.2	15.4	8.4	13.1	16.2	17.2	17.8	21.0	14.2
International organization	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.6	0.2
Mixture of organizations	7.3	6.5	5.3	5.7	4.7	5.8	5.0	6.2	10.2	6.2
Unknown	14.3	16.1	16.8	19.1	12.8	14.7	17.4	17.6	11.6	15.8
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 38** Major Issues in Contention by Active Social Groups (%)

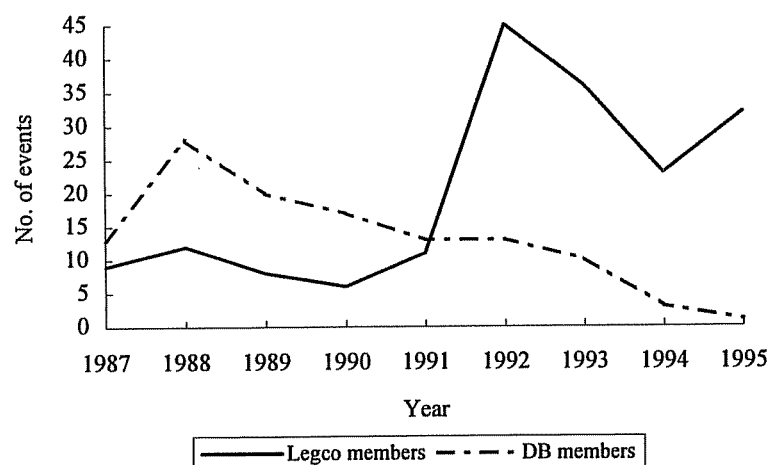
	Production workers	Students	Government officials
Civil rights	0.0	65.5	0.5
Housing	0.5	0.0	1.0
Labour and employment	57.6	8.6	91.8
Politics and government	2.3	25.0	5.1
Transport	39.6	0.9	1.5
(N)	(217)	(116)	(195)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

The proportion of events with insufficient information on the involvement of members of different representative institutions ranged from 8.7 per cent (Urbco) to 10.6 per cent (DBs). Table 39 gives the proportions of social conflict events with the involvement of these political leaders. It is obvious that members of the municipal councils rarely engaged themselves in social conflicts. Legco members were more active in this respect than DB members. Besides, their trends of development were utterly different. As shown in Figure 23, with the introduction of direct election to the Legco in 1991, the number of social conflict events reported to have the support of Legco members rose significantly. As a matter of fact, most of the elected Legco members of the democratic camp came from grassroots organizations and had to maintain their political capital by playing the role of protest action leader. On the contrary, except for a rise in 1988, the participation of DB members in collective contentions was on a declining trend. To what extent such difference is subjected to the imbalance and incomplete newspaper reporting remains to be examined.

**Table 39** Conflict Events with Involvement of Members of Representative Institutions, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Legco	3.0	3.7	1.5	1.2	3.1	9.7	8.6	5.7	8.8	5.0
Urbco	0.3	0.9	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.3
Regco	0.3	1.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.3
DB	4.3	8.7	3.8	3.3	3.6	2.8	2.4	0.7	0.3	3.2

**Figure 23** Trends of Participation by Legco Members and DB Members, 1987-1995

### Target Party

For a social conflict to occur, certain real organization(s) or people outside the claim-making party must be held responsible for the perceived grievance. We name this group target party of the social conflict event. The claim-making party believes that, should the

target party be responsive, its grievances could be redressed or its interests be advanced. In this study, we recorded up to two target parties per each conflict event. Of all the 3,661 events, a total of 3,789 target parties was identified.

As shown in Table 40, most social conflicts involved the state, either as a party to conflict or as an object of claims. The Hong Kong government *per se* and its administrative departments made up 63.9 per cent of all the recorded target parties. It was found that the government councils, i.e., the Exco, Legco, Urbco, Regco and DBs, had not been a major conflict target. They together constituted only 1.3 per cent of the total.

The Chinese government, together with its NCNA, was another focus of conflicting aims. From 1987 to 1995, about one-eighth of all collective contentions were directed towards the Chinese government.

Employers and manufacturers came third, taking up only 5.2 per cent of the total record. Other local public institutions, transition-related official organizations (such as the Basic Law Drafting Committee, the Basic Law Consultative Committee, the Preliminary Working Committee and the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), as well as other overseas polities and organizations were of lesser importance in this respect. They each only made up 2 to 3 per cent of our account of target parties.

Figure 24 highlights the trend of the two major targets of social conflicts. The involvement of the Hong Kong government remained at a high level. Incidents of collective actions with the local government as target rose in 1990 and peaked in 1992. The years 1994 and 1995 saw a slow downward trend. Before 1989, social conflicts targeted the Chinese government were generally non-existent. This kind of contentions shot up in 1989 and declined gradually to another nadir in 1992. It then rose considerably in 1994, the year in which a 12-year sentence was passed upon Xi Yang, a Hong Kong journalist, after a secret trial in Beijing on charges of spying and stealing state secrets; and local journalists were then refused entry into China.

**Table 40** Target Party of Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Hong Kong government	82.0	76.2	41.8	61.0	70.7	81.9	71.3	49.9	53.2	63.9
Government councils <sup>(1)</sup>	1.0	1.2	1.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.7	4.9	2.1	1.3
Other public institution	0.3	1.5	3.3	3.8	1.9	1.3	3.3	4.4	2.1	2.6
New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch), Chinese government	2.6	1.8	28.8	14.6	13.9	5.4	6.5	20.2	11.9	12.8
Transition-related official organization <sup>(2)</sup>	0.3	6.8	2.2	4.4	0.0	0.0	1.6	1.2	1.3	2.0
Organization in China	0.0	0.3	0.7	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.2
Employer, manufacturer	6.2	3.8	7.6	4.0	3.0	4.1	6.5	3.7	7.1	5.2
Overseas polity, organization <sup>(3)</sup>	2.6	2.1	10.0	3.8	2.4	3.9	2.8	1.2	3.4	3.9
Others <sup>(4)</sup>	4.9	6.5	4.3	8.1	7.1	3.2	7.2	14.6	18.5	8.1
(N)	(306)	(340)	(552)	(521)	(368)	(464)	(429)	(431)	(378)	(3,789)

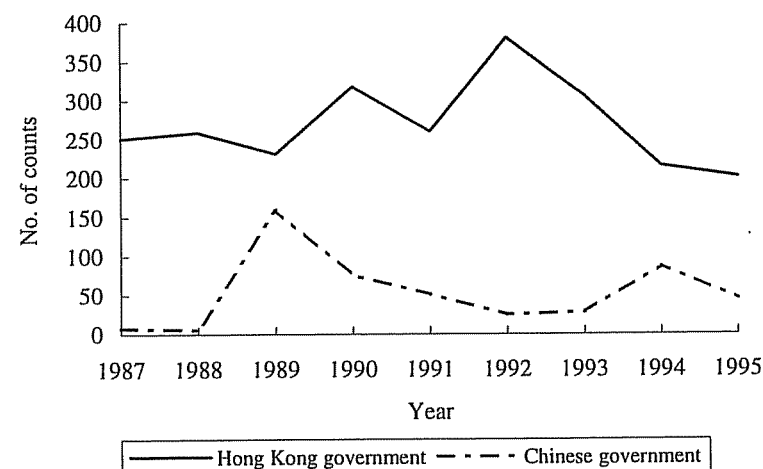
Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

(1) Includes Exco, OMELCO, Legco, Urbco, Regco and DBs.

(2) Includes Basic Law Drafting Committee, Basic Law Consultative Committee, PWC and PC.

(3) Includes British government.

(4) Includes Consumer Council.

**Figure 24** Trends of Involvement of Hong Kong and Chinese Government as Conflict Target, 1987-1995

### Third Party

A third party in a social conflict is always perceived as a neutral arbitrator. It plays an intermediary role in mediating between the contending parties. Its intercession can help mitigate the escalation of conflict and hasten the resolution of conflict. In the present study, we recorded up to two third parties per each event. Neither the involvement of police in regulating or pacifying a social conflict nor the mass media in publicizing the event are classified as a third party. The involvement of a third party in social conflicts was rather infrequent. Altogether, a total of 582 third parties was identified from all the recorded social conflict events, with their distribution shown in Table 41. In the 1980s, it was more common for people to file their complaints with government councils than with other institutions. In recent years, their relative importance in reconciling public grievances declined considerably.



**Table 41** Third Party to Social Conflict Events, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Hong Kong government	14.0	6.2	12.3	24.1	14.0	20.0	15.5	14.7	16.2	15.6
Government councils <sup>(1)</sup>	74.4	84.0	64.6	59.3	81.4	74.3	63.8	29.4	35.1	66.2
Other public institution	1.2	1.2	0.0	2.8	2.3	1.4	3.4	5.9	2.7	2.1
New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch), Chinese government	0.0	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.1	1.0
Transition-related official organization <sup>(2)</sup>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Organization in China	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	0.3
Employer, manufacturer	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	2.7	0.5
Overseas polity, organization <sup>(3)</sup>	3.5	0.0	4.6	6.5	0.0	1.4	1.7	2.9	5.4	3.1
Others <sup>(4)</sup>	7.0	4.9	16.9	6.5	2.3	2.9	13.8	47.1	27.0	11.2
(N)	(86)	(81)	(65)	(108)	(43)	(70)	(58)	(34)	(37)	(582)

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

(1) Includes Exco, OMELCO, Legco, Urbco, Regco and DBs.

(2) Includes Basic Law Drafting Committee, Basic Law Consultative Committee, PWC and PC.

(3) Includes British government.

(4) Includes Consumer Council.

It is obvious that the state was also regarded by the public as the primary arbitrator of social conflicts. It made up the absolute majority of all the recorded third parties. However, the relative importance of the government *per se* and of its councils in mediating social conflicts was completely reversed when compared with that as a conflict target. The respective proportions of the government *per se* and the government councils as a third party to collective contentions were 15.6 per cent and 66.2 per cent. All other institutions, within or outside Hong Kong, were of negligible importance.

### Outcome

Bearing in mind the practical necessity to demarcate the termination of every collective action and the limitation of using newspaper reports as the primary data source, we recorded only the outcomes covered by the press in the course or in the immediate or intermediate aftermath of the conflict event.

The distributive aspect of conflict outcome is classified from the standpoint of the claim-making party into the following three categories:

1. Unsuccessful: the claim-making party aims to change the *status quo* but the outcome is similar to the situation before the conflict erupted.
2. Partial success: the claim-making party aims to change the *status quo* and the outcome is a compromise between the goals of the contending parties, for example, mutual concession, trade off.
3. Successful: the claim-making party aims to change the *status quo* and succeeds in gaining most or all of that sought from the target party.

In addition to the distributive aspect, we also try to record the political outcome of social conflicts by taking down the governmental responses and political consequences. We have only confined the analysis of political outcome to the social conflicts which

targeted the Hong Kong government and have excluded those targeted the Chinese government or involving it as the third party as well as those directed at overseas polities.

The results shown in Tables 42 to 44 indicate clearly that the attempt to gather information on social conflict outcome from newspaper reports is practically futile. The proportion of events with insufficient information ranges from 60.4 per cent (governmental response) to 98.3 per cent (political consequence).<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, based on the limited available data, it could be observed that the proportion of unsuccessful collective contention was larger than that of successful ones (7.2 per cent vs. 1.3 per cent).

### Concluding Remarks

People participate in social conflicts when they believe such acts of civil disobedience are justifiable on normative or utilitarian grounds, their goals are fully or partially attainable, and their participation will pay off. The reasons, the ways and the outcomes of social conflicts are conditioned by the socio-economic and political situation of the society as well as the relative capacity and orientation of contending parties. The occurrence of socially accepted conflicts in turn empowers the civil society by providing an opportunity of collective experience and learning, by strengthening people's sense of collective identity and efficacy and, consequently, by altering the structure of social and political power.

Hong Kong people are known for their political alienation, apathy and self-perceived powerlessness. The partial democratization of the government, together with its relative permissiveness regarding non-violent collective contentions, has nonetheless brought about some changes in people's perception of and propensity to participating in social conflicts. They tend to deem collective action as an effective means to articulate their interests,<sup>30</sup> and they are also quite ready to take part in these non-institutionalized actions.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 42** Immediate Outcome, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Unsuccessful	5.7	4.0	3.4	8.1	9.2	1.7	3.8	16.6	13.8	7.2
Partial realization of objective, demand partially fulfilled	3.3	2.2	1.5	0.6	0.8	3.5	2.9	4.5	3.3	2.4
Successful	1.3	1.9	0.2	1.2	1.1	0.6	2.1	2.2	1.1	1.3
Unknown, indeterminate	89.7	91.9	94.9	90.2	88.8	94.2	91.2	76.7	81.8	89.1
(N)	(300)	(322)	(525)	(509)	(358)	(462)	(419)	(404)	(362)	(3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 43** Governmental Response, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
No response	8.0	17.1	26.9	18.9	25.1	14.1	18.6	47.8	39.0	24.1
Debate, question in representative institutions	7.3	2.8	1.7	1.0	3.9	2.6	1.4	2.2	3.0	2.6
Administrative response, intervention	15.7	18.6	6.5	5.1	14.8	11.0	11.0	11.6	14.4	11.4
Formal inquiry	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.7	0.0	0.8	0.4
Mixture of responses	0.7	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.4
Others	1.7	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.3	1.1	0.7	1.7	0.8	0.7
Unknown, not applicable (N)	66.7 (300)	61.2 (322)	63.8 (525)	75.0 (509)	55.6 (358)	70.8 (462)	66.6 (419)	34.7 (404)	42.0 (362)	60.4 (3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 44** Political Consequence, 1987-1995 (%)

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Total
Personnel change	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Institutional change	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Legislative, policy change	1.3	0.9	0.6	0.4	0.8	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.9	1.0
Mixture of consequences	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.3
Others	0.7	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.4
None, not applicable, unknown (N)	97.7 (300)	98.4 (322)	98.5 (525)	99.4 (509)	99.2 (358)	98.7 (462)	98.3 (419)	96.1 (404)	97.5 (362)	98.3 (3,661)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

The present study has attempted to inventory the everyday social conflicts occurring during the period of 1987 to 1995 and to examine the ways people used to protect or forward their collective interests. A total of 3,661 social conflict events was recorded. The major pattern and changes are summarized in the following observations.

The frequency of collective contentions peaked in 1989 and declined gradually in the 1990s. Most of these recorded social conflicts were of short duration, initiated by named groups instead of individual persons, engaged neither allies nor antagonist parties and of limited number of participants. The majority of conflict actions was decorous and bounded by mutually-agreed-upon principles. Occurrence of violence was extremely rare, and governmental repression rather self-controlled. None of the recorded events resulted in fatalities and only a negligible proportion of people was injured or arrested.

Most social conflicts involved the state, either as an object of claims, a party to conflict, or a conflict arbitrator. Citizenship became an accepted basis for making claims on the government. Since 1989 onwards, the Chinese government, which had "participated" in social conflicts mainly as the absent object of people's grievances and demands, had risen from an insignificant to a dominant position.

The past decade saw an expanding zone of conflicts, involving more and more social groups of various natures and individuals from different walks of life. Among these social groups, labour unions, political and pressure groups were the most active in organizing collective action. Student associations, residential and community groups also played a role in this respect. The social base of collective contention was getting broader and more heterogeneous. Participants in many conflict events came from different occupations, industries or organizations. In general, production workers, students, civil servants and people with union or political party affiliation tended to be involved more often in collective action. It is obvious that the most deprived or the objectively disadvantaged people, such as the least-educated

women and the elderly who were cast off the labour market during the process of de-industrialization, were not the most active participants in social conflicts. While collective contentions joined predominantly by other social categories generally underwent a decline in recent years, those engaged mainly by political group members had experienced a steady increase since 1990. The introduction of direct election to the Legco in 1991 brought a great leap in the engagement of Legco members in social conflicts.

Issues underlying social conflict can be conceptually divided into two broad kinds: consensual and dissensual. Consensual conflict exists when the distribution of desired, scarce resources is regarded as unsatisfactory or unjust to one party and its relationship with the target party is perceived to be of a zero-sum nature. Dissensual conflict arises when the conflicting parties have incompatible beliefs, values or norms and when one party is so convinced of the importance of its views or values that it wishes the target party to consent. Social conflicts during the period under study developed along both lines of conflicts. Among the five most frequent conflicting issues, contentions of a labour, housing and transport nature were consensual conflicts with basically a sectorial scope. Their goals and demands were mostly instrumental and tangible, such as relief, remedy and improvement in life and living standards. They were taken up largely by specific sectors of population concerned, such as labour union and professional group members, production workers, civil servants and public housing residents. These conflicts saw a fluctuating trend but experienced no long-term decisive decline in recent years. Contentions of a civil rights and political nature, on the contrary, were dissensual conflicts with an outside-Hong Kong or a territory-wide scope. They were engaged mainly by students and political group members. Civil rights-related conflicts sprung up in 1989 and targeted primarily the Chinese government while political conflicts were augmented by the release of concerned proposals or policies on political reform. Both types of conflicts were fundamentally situational, defensive and reform-oriented,

but not revolutionary. Yet, they all witnessed a significant fall in the early 1990s.

The development of mass politics has changed the structure of power and altered the relationship between power-holders and ordinary people. People are prone to defend or to advance the interests of their own collectively. However, the rise and fall of collective contentions were caused more by the mobilization power of indigenous interest organizations, the internal political opportunity structure as well as the external forces of the Chinese government than by people's grievances and frustration. Consensus conflicts were usually deescalated through bureaucratic institutionalization of concessions to claim-making groups and thus furnished resource bases for future conflicts of a similar nature. Dissensus conflicts that mainly struggled for democracy were stimulated by the colonial government, thwarted by the overwhelming Chinese government, failed to broaden their popular support and were set on a downward trend.

The process of decolonization has generated new sources of conflicts as well as opened up new political opportunities for the general public and political activists. Despite the promise of the Chinese government to maintain the original social structure and lifestyle of Hong Kong for 50 years after the regime transfer, the post-1997 socio-economic and political environment as well as the ethos of the Hong Kong people and the power-holders would undoubtedly be different from that of the transitional period. The impact of these changes on the settings, sources, bases and modes of social conflicts has yet to be examined.

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7. See L.F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (Pittsburgh: Boxwood Press, 1960); P.A. Sorokin, *The Sociology of Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1925); and Q. Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
8. L.A. Coser, *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 232.
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13. See C. Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 247-52; R.W. Mack and R.C. Snyder, "The Analysis of Social Conflict: Toward an Overview and Synthesis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 1 (1957), pp. 218-19; Gurr, *Handbook of Political Conflict*, p. 2. Operationalizations of different aspects of a social conflict event are given in the respective sections.
14. The major journalistic appeal of *Ming Pao Daily News* is informative and articulate. It provides a relatively large coverage of local news. On newspaper's credibility, it ranked top by the general public in 1996 and ranked third by local journalists in 1990. See *U-Beat Magazine*, Vol. 11 (1996), p. 22; and J.M. Chan, P.S.N. Lee and C.C. Lee, *Hong Kong Journalists in Transition* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1996).
15. This set of newspaper clippings came from seven major Chinese Hong Kong dailies, namely, the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, *Hong Kong Economic Times*, *Ming Pao Daily News*, *Oriental Daily News*, *Ta Kung Pao*, *Wah Kiu Yat Pao* and *Wen Wei Po*, and two English dailies, namely, *The Hong Kong Standard* and *South China Morning Post*.
16. If two or more simultaneous conflict actions occur in the same place(s) aiming at the same issue in contention with basically the same participants, these actions are counted as one event. If two or more conflict actions can be traced as the development of a specific conflict, i.e., with the same objective and basically the same participants, they are also counted as one event.
17. See Cheung and Louie, *Social Conflicts in Hong Kong, 1975-1986*, pp. 9-10. Although their study and the present study adopt similar research method and data sources, the two data sets are not entirely comparable. The fundamental difference comes from the operational definition of social conflict. While Cheung and Louie include the articulation of identifiable claims or demands in their definition, we leave this attribute out. However, our data set indicates that only 0.2 per cent of the recorded events can be regarded as apparently random, such as tension-releasing, play-

- ful, and 0.1 per cent aimed to damage specific object without an attempt to maintain control. In other words, the absolute majority of our recorded social conflicts had identifiable claims or demands (see the section on major objective for further details). In Cheung and Louie's study, only 136 cases were reported in 1986. Our study recorded 300 cases in 1987, an inconceivable increase of 120.6 per cent. The major reason for this increase — discrepancy in the definition of social conflict, actual increase of social conflicts, increased newspaper reporting, or underreporting in Cheung and Louie's study — is yet to be examined.
18. That is to say, repressive force is always applied in proportion to the violation of proscription. People who commit an unauthorized act suffer punitive sanction, and its severity hinges upon the seriousness of the act.
  19. See Census and Statistics Department, *1996 Population By-census: Summary Result* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1996), pp. 28-29, 32.
  20. See Census and Statistics Department, *1996 Population By-census: Summary Result*, p. 41.
  21. The review of developments in representative government took place in 1987. The 1988 White Paper proposed some directly-elected seats in the Legco. Opinion was divided as to the pace of democratization. The British government took up the matter in rounds of negotiation with the Chinese government in late 1989 and early 1990. The British government confirmed in February 1990 that the Legco would have 18 directly-elected seats in 1991 and at least 20 in 1995. The Chinese government agreed in April 1990 to increase the number of directly-elected seats for the first legislature of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region from 15 to 20.
  22. Governor Patten set out the proposals for political development in the years up to 1997 in his inaugural address to the Legco in October 1992 that aimed to "look for other ways of extending democratic participation, in conformity with the terms of the Basic Law." See Hong Kong Government, *Representative Government in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1994), p. 9. There were then heated debates between the Chinese and the British governments as well as wide-ranging discussions in the community.

23. See Lau Siu-kai, Lee Ming-kwan, Wan Po-san and Wong Siu-lun (eds), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1988* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1991), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1990* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1992), and *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1993* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1995), *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1995* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1997) for details on that series of biennial territory-wide surveys.
24. Most of them aimed at pressing for the right of abode in the United Kingdom for the 3.25 million British Dependent Territory citizens in Hong Kong.
25. Many of them were related to the draft Basic Law which came out in 1988.
26. *Kowloon Disturbances 1966: Report of Commission of Inquiry* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1967), p. 129.
27. Standing Committee on Pressure Groups, *Report from the Standing Committee on Pressure Groups* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1981).
28. See J. Lofland, *Protest: Studies of Collective Behaviour and Social Movement* (New Brunswick: Transaction Book, 1985) for his elaboration on the distinction among persuasive and polite action, irreverent protest action and destructive violent action.
29. Includes "not applicable" cases.
30. In the 1991 social indicators survey, respondents were asked: "If people can unite to voice their opinion, they can influence government policies." About 59.8 per cent agreed, only 17 per cent thought otherwise. See Hsiao Hsin-huang and Wan Po-san, "The Confidence Gap in Public Sphere," in Lau Siu-kai, Wan Po-san, Lee Ming-kwan and Wong Siu-lun (eds), *New Frontiers of Social Indicators Research in Chinese Societies* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1996), p. 294.
31. In the 1993 social indicators survey, we asked the respondents whether they would be afraid of getting into trouble affecting themselves if they participated in protest action against the government, most of the respondents (55.8 per cent) said they would not be afraid, as compared with 23.1 per cent who were afraid.

## Social Conflicts in Hong Kong 1987-1995

### Abstract

This study attempts to inventory the everyday social conflicts occurring between 1 January 1987 and 31 December 1995. A total of 3,661 social conflict events was recorded.

Most of the recorded social conflicts were of short duration, initiated by named groups, engaged neither allies nor antagonist parties, and limited in the number of participants. The majority of conflict actions was decorous and bounded by mutually-agreed-upon principles. Occurrence of violence was extremely rare, and governmental repression rather self-controlled.

Most social conflicts involved the state, either as an object of claims, a party to conflict, or a conflict arbitrator. Citizenship became an accepted basis for making claims on the government. Since 1989 onwards, the Chinese government, which had "participated" in social conflicts mainly as the absent object of people's grievances and demands, had risen from an insignificant to a dominant position.

The past decade saw an expanding zone of conflicts and the social base of collective contention became broader and more heterogeneous. Production workers, students, civil servants and people with union or political party affiliation tended to be involved more often in collective action. While social conflicts joined predominantly by other social categories generally underwent a decline in recent years, those engaged mainly by political group members had experienced a steady increase since 1990.

Among the five most frequent conflict issues, contentions of a labour, housing and transport nature were consensual conflicts with basically a sectorial scope. Their goals and demands were mostly instrumental and tangible. These conflicts saw a fluctuating trend but experienced no definite long-term decline in later years. Contentions of a civil rights and political nature, on the contrary, were dissensual conflicts with an outside-Hong Kong or a territory-wide scope. Both types of conflicts were fundamentally situational, defensive and reform-oriented, but not revolutionary. Yet, they all witnessed a significant decline in the early 1990s.



# 一九八七至九五年間的香港社會衝突

劉兆佳 尹寶珊

## （摘要）

本研究彙列一九八七年一月一日至一九九五年十二月三十一日期間的社會衝突事件，記錄所得的總數為 3,661 起。

這些社會衝突事件大都為時短暫、由具有名稱的團體發動、並無盟友或敵對群體，其參與者亦為數不多。在行動形式上，大部分都是平和的，並遵守大家默認的規則。暴力極少出現，政府的施壓也具有高度的自我剋制。

大多數的社會衝突都和香港政府扯上關係，或者作為訴求的對象，或者作為衝突中的一方，又或者作為衝突的仲裁者。在向政府提出訴求時，公民權利已成為公認的基礎。自一九八九年以來，中國政府以隱而不見的形式「介入」社會衝突中，成為民眾宣洩不滿或提出訴求的對象，其角色日益顯著。

在過往十年，衝突事件的覆蓋面漸趨廣闊，涉及的社會群體亦愈來愈多樣化。產業工人、學生、公務員，以及有工會背景和政黨聯繫的民眾，較多地捲入集體行動中。然而自一九九零年以來，有政黨成員參與的衝突事件有所增加，涉及其他社群的則數量下降。

在就業、住屋、交通、公民權利和政治問題這五大類最常見的衝突中，前三者主要涉及若干界別的利益，其爭取目標較為實利性，此等衝突起伏不定，但在近年並無明顯減少的趨勢。後兩者則往往以整個香港的福祉為訴求，涉及的範圍有時甚至超出香港之外，具有價值判斷的性質，深受時事影響，但其爭取目標仍然在於尋求改革而非革命，然而，九十年代以來，此等衝突俱顯著減少。