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Social Conflicts in Hong Kong

1996-2002

Wan Po-san

Timothy Ka-ying Wong

香港亞太研究所



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Wan Po-san
Timothy Ka-ying Wong

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

About the Authors

Wan Po-san is Research Officer at the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Timothy Ka-ying Wong is Research Associate Professor at the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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One of my intentions... is to abolish the academic distinction between conflict and consensus which makes it impossible to analyse all the real situations in which consensual submission is accomplished in and through conflict. (Bourdieu, 1990:41)

Introduction

“Whether desirable or not, conflict is inevitable, and resolution of conflict is a matter of decision” (Rasch, 2000:21). Many scholars have noted an increase in contentious forms of collective action. For example, Dalton (1996:75), according to survey results since the 1970s in the four liberal democracies of the United States, Britain, Germany and France, concludes that “protest is becoming a more common political activity in advanced industrial democracies.”¹ Tarrow (1994:193-98) suggests that the social movement form of representing claims is becoming institutionalized in advanced industrial democracies and that social movement modes of action are becoming part of the conventional repertoire of socio-political participation.

The “movement society” idea is built upon three hypotheses: (1) that social protest has become a perpetual element in modern life; (2) that protest behaviour is used with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies and to represent a wider range of claims; and (3) that professionalization and institutionalization are transforming social movement into an instrument within the realm of conventional politics (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998:4).

In Hong Kong, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a variety of social forces — for example, rising public aspirations for quality of life, the conscientization of citizen entitlements, growing demands for government intervention and provision, the partial democratization of the government, and the subsequent limited expansion of political opportunities and burgeoning party politics — have created a breeding ground for social activism. More and more issues are articulated and organized in forms of social conflict and targeted at the polity.

A comprehensive information system on social conflict is essential to the management and resolution of the proliferation of such events. Observers of Hong Kong society have offered ample illustrations of various types of social conflict.² Cheung and Louie's (1991) study, the first archival attempt to compile a comprehensive and machine-readable database on social conflicts in Hong Kong, covers a 12-year period from 1975 to 1986. Altogether, 882 cases were recorded. The observable pattern points to an increasing number of conflicts involving issues relating to quality of life and civil and political rights. Most conflicts articulated sectoral and local interests, with demands for longer-term institutional changes and non-material rights. The means used for articulation were conciliatory. Another significant feature is the presence of more permanent groups.

Our institute's previous study (Lau and Wan, 1997) covers another nine-year period from 1987 to 1995. A total of 3,661 social conflicts were recorded. The frequency of contentions peaked in 1989 and declined gradually in the 1990s. Most of them involved the state, were of short duration, decorous, initiated by named groups, engaged neither allied nor antagonistic parties and were composed of limited numbers of participants. The social base of collective contentions became broader and more heterogeneous. The three most frequently conflicting issues were related to labour, civil rights and housing.

The present study covers a consecutive period from 1996 to 2002. These seven years saw several crucial events — for example, the scheduled transfer of regime in 1997, the unanticipated Asian financial turmoil, the sudden economic downturn and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter, HKSAR) government's subsequent multifarious reform initiatives. These events have

generated new sources of conflict as well as opened up political opportunities for the general public and political activists. We aim to analyse the impact of these changes on the settings, sources, bases and modes of social conflict. Specifically, our objectives are:

- To build up a comprehensive database on various kinds of social conflicts occurring between 1 January 1996 and 30 June 2002.
- To study the origins, dynamics, patterns and trends of these events.
- To analyse the modes of conflict management and resolution.

Since our data on conflict events are limited to the aggregate level, no attempt will be made to examine social conflict on the group or individual level. A quantitative analysis of the profile and trend of social conflicts 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

To date, no consensus has been reached regarding the definition of social conflict, although the various definitions in use have much in common.³ As in our previous study, we will adopt a broad working definition proposed by Gurr (1980:1): "Conflict phenomena are the overt, coercive interactions of contending collectivities." 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 classes and 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. Conflicts that are without mutually opposing actions, for example, letters written by individuals or groups to a newspaper editor or a newspaper column, or protest advertisements, are excluded from our sample.⁴

- (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 action to non-violent action. The objectives of the parties involved can be instrumental (such as an attempt to gain control of scarce resources and positions or to influence behaviour in certain directions) and/or expressive (such as an attempt to satisfy anger, a thirst for excitement or a desire for group solidarity). Reports on violent crime (such as rape, assault, murder or robbery with firearms) and non-violent crime (such as burglary, theft or 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.⁵

Sources of Data

Following this conception, we compiled every event of social conflict occurring between 1 January 1996 and 30 June 2002 reported in:

- (1) the *Ming Pao Daily News*,⁶
- (2) the classified newspaper clippings on Hong Kong society maintained by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong,⁷
- (3) newspaper clippings on Hong Kong society published by the Hong Kong Catholic Social Communications Office,⁸ and
- (4) WiseNews (<http://wisenews.wisers.net>).⁹

It should be cautioned that the numbers of conflict events occurring before and after 1 January 2000 are not exactly comparable. In order to make the data set as comprehensive as possible, we replaced the newspaper clipping collections maintained by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies and the Hong Kong Catholic Social Communications Office with articles from WiseNews. WiseNews not only covers a larger number of newspapers than the other two

collections, but also allows us to perform keyword searches that definitely yield more news accounts of conflict events.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was adopted to collect information from these newspaper reports. Admittedly, problems of reliability and validity arise from the limited coverage and selectivity of the data sources. The limitations of using newspaper reports as a primary data source have been well documented.¹⁰ Major errors of our database will probably be due to:

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

In view of this, supplementary information from other sources should be consulted when further analysing the data. Although not perfect in completeness and descriptive accuracy, newspaper reports on social conflicts in Hong Kong are relatively free from political censorship, suppression or distortion. However, it should be noted that the voluminous data are of uneven quality. While the locations, objectives, demands, nature and modes of action of conflict events are generally clearly described in newspaper reports, information on the number and background of initiators and participants, number of non-participants affected and particularly the outcome of collective actions are often found to be wanting.

Data Processing and Validation

Five coders were employed and instructed to code mainly the manifest content of the newspaper report according to a classification and coding scheme used in our previous study. In the beginning, a set of newspaper reports on social conflict events occurring between 1 January 1996 and 15 January 1996 was coded by each of them independently. With the exception of conflict objectives, nature of

issues in contention and social backgrounds of participants, the extent of agreement was consistently high. They then completed the coding of four years of observations. Guidelines were set and new codes were added accordingly. Eight more coders were subsequently recruited and trained to follow the coding rules. In the end, to reduce coding errors, 25% of all the coded variables were recoded by checkers.

The “key-to-disc” method was employed to key in the codes on the coding sheets into the computer. Each coded sheet was keyed in twice to ensure accuracy. The inputted data then had to pass through a range check for every data item and a logic check for related data items.

Profile and Trend of Social Conflicts

Temporal Distribution

Our sample records that a total of 3,385 social conflict events occurred from 1 January 1996 to 30 June 2002, yielding a yearly average of 521 and a monthly average of 43.¹¹

Table 1 presents the number of social conflict events by year and the percentage change over the preceding year. The drastic increase in conflict events in 2000, i.e., a rise from 363 in 1999 to 790 in 2000, is probably due to a change in the method of data collection.

Before 2000, the number of conflict events per year neither rose nor fell significantly. The year-to-year fluctuations ranged from +4.3% to -9.9%. The greatest number of social conflict events

Table 1 Number of Social Conflict Events

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Number	404	364	348	363	790	802	314	3385
(%)	(11.9)	(10.8)	(10.3)	(10.7)	(23.3)	(23.7)	(9.3)	(100.0)
% change ¹	—	-9.9	-4.4	+4.3	+117.6	+1.5	—	—

Note: 1. Percentage change over the preceding year.

occurred in 1996, the year before the transfer of regime. In that year, 404 events were recorded. Of these events, nearly one-third (32.2%) took place in September and October. The year 1997 came next, with a reported total of 364 events, a decline of 9.9% over the preceding year. Notwithstanding the onset of the Asian financial turmoil since the second half of 1997, the year 1998 marked the lowest record: 348 events. The number of events rose slightly to 363 in 1999, an increase of 4.3% over 1998.

The year 2001 marked the greatest number of events in the whole period under study. In that year, 802 events were recorded. Yet, this represents a mere 1.5% increase over the preceding year.

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.

As shown in Table 2, the locations of 12.4% of collective actions were not mentioned in the newspaper reports. In terms of year-to-year variation, the proportions of social conflicts with an unknown location range widely from 5.2% to 16.3%. The figures are relatively higher for the years 2001 (16.3%) and 1996 (15.6%) and lower for 1999 (5.2%) and 2002 (6.7%).

Government buildings were the most popular venues for public voicing of claims. Nearly four out of ten (39.3%) of our total recorded conflicts occurred in such locations — 6.9% at the Legislative Council (hereafter, Legco) building and the Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (hereafter, OMELCO), 1.2% at Government House and 31.2% at other government buildings and offices (including the Office of the Chief Executive). It should be noted that about a quarter of the events counted under the category of other government buildings actually took place at public places and the buildings mentioned above as well.

The Legco building was once the most popular location for collective action. For example, 28.3% and 25.2% of the conflict events reported in 1987 and 1988, respectively, took place there. From 1993 onwards, the proportion of collective actions taking place at the

Table 2 Locations of Social Conflict Events (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Government buildings								
Legco building ¹	5.7	10.7	7.2	7.2	7.1	4.5	8.6	6.9
Government House ²	4.7	2.7	1.7	.3	.4	.1	.0	1.2
Others ³	13.6	32.7	40.2	35.8	31.1	31.5	36.3	31.2
Chinese government-related authorities								
NCNA ⁴	12.4	3.8	3.4	3.9	.1	.2	.0	2.7
Liaison Office ⁵	.0	.0	.0	.0	2.2	1.4	1.3	.9
Foreign Affairs Office	.0	1.4	2.0	1.1	.5	.2	.3	.7
PWC, PC ⁶	1.2	.0	.0	.0	.0	.2	.0	.2
PLA	.0	.0	.0	.3	.1	.0	.0	.1
Public places ⁷	15.1	14.3	12.6	15.4	14.9	16.5	14.6	15.0
Business/industrial places ⁸	13.4	10.2	11.8	11.0	12.8	14.8	16.2	13.1
Consulates in Hong Kong ⁹	13.9	8.2	6.0	12.1	2.0	2.2	1.0	5.6
Schools	.7	1.6	.0	2.5	2.0	1.4	1.9	1.5
Others	3.7	1.6	3.2	5.2	14.1	10.5	13.1	8.5
Unknown	15.6	12.6	11.8	5.2	12.7	16.3	6.7	12.4
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

Notes:

Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

1. Includes OMELCO. Nine events took place at the Legco building and public places; 9 events at the Legco building and Government House/other government buildings; 4 events at the Legco building, other government buildings and public places; 1 event at the Legco building and business/industrial places; 1 event at the Legco building, other government buildings and business/industrial places; and 1 event at the Legco building, Government House, other government buildings and the NCNA.
2. Ten events took place at Government House and public places; and 2 events at Government House and other government buildings.
3. Includes detention centres for Vietnamese boat people. A total of 298 events took place at government buildings and public places; 21 events at government buildings and business/industrial places; 2 events at government buildings, business/industrial places and public places; and 1 event at government buildings and the Chung Hwa Travel Service.
4. A total of 25 events took place at the NCNA and public places; 1 event at the NCNA and other government buildings; and 1 event at the NCNA and the PC.
5. Two events took place at the Liaison Office and the Legco building/Government House/other government buildings; and 12 events at the Liaison Office and public places.
6. One event took place at the PC and public places.
7. Includes only on-the-street actions. Other in-door public places, such as the airport, markets, government hospitals, as well as some particular organizations, such as Heung Yee Kuk, are classified under the category of "others."
8. Includes construction sites. A total of 35 events took place in business/industrial places and public places.
9. Includes the Chung Hwa Travel Service. Four events took place at consulates and the Legco building/Government House/other government buildings; 6 events at consulates and the NCNA; and 43 events at consulates and public places.

Legco building dropped to around 10% (Lau and Wan, 1997:10). The present data show that the share of social conflict events that occurred at the Legco building has further declined to around 7%. The year 1997 witnessed the highest proportion (10.7%) while 2001 the lowest (4.5%).

Other government buildings attracted about one-tenth of the conflicts during the period from 1987 to 1995 (Lau and Wan, 1997:10). In the present study, with the exception of 1996, the proportion of conflict events that occurred in such places rose significantly to about one-third of all the recorded conflicts. The peak was marked in 1998, with a proportion of 40.2%.

Collective actions in front of the New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch) (hereafter, NCNA) dropped drastically after the transfer of regime. On the whole, only 2.7% of our recorded conflict events took place in front of the NCNA. Among these events, 53.8% occurred in 1996. After 1997, local social conflict actions in front of other Chinese government-related authorities in the territory, such as the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR (hereafter, Foreign Affairs Office), the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR (hereafter, Liaison Office) and the People's Liberation Army Forces Hong Kong (Hong Kong Garrison) (hereafter, PLA), have also been negligible.

Business and industrial places were not popular venues for collective action. During the period from 1987 to 1995, only 3.1% of all conflicts took place in such locations; however, the proportion in the mid-1990s was double that of the earlier years (Lau and Wan, 1997:10). The trend continued to show an increase in the present study. The proportion of conflicts occurring in business and industrial places rose to 13.1% of all the recorded events. The year 2002 marked the highest proportion (16.2%), followed by 2001 (14.8%).

About 15% of all the recorded collective actions actually took place on the street. The proportion of these events, ranging from 12.6% (1998) to 16.5% (2001), remained fairly stable during the whole period. Table 3 breaks down the location of such events by District Council (formerly District Board, hereafter, DC) district.

Table 3 Out-of-door Social Conflict Events by District Council District (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Central and Western	9.8	11.5	27.3	30.4	13.6	10.6	37.0	17.3
Wan Chai	9.8	28.8	18.2	14.3	11.0	15.9	10.9	14.9
Eastern	.0	.0	2.3	1.8	2.5	1.5	.0	1.4
Southern	3.3	1.9	.0	.0	1.7	.8	.0	1.2
Kowloon City	1.6	.0	.0	1.8	3.4	3.0	.0	2.0
Kwun Tong	8.2	1.9	.0	12.5	.8	.8	.0	2.9
Sham Shui Po	1.6	.0	2.3	.0	2.5	2.3	.0	1.6
Wong Tai Sin	.0	1.9	4.5	.0	1.7	6.1	.0	2.6
Yau Tsim Mong	27.9	25.0	13.6	12.5	11.0	15.2	15.2	16.3
Islands	.0	3.8	2.3	8.9	3.4	2.3	2.2	3.1
North	1.6	1.9	4.5	3.6	4.2	3.8	4.3	3.5
Sai Kung	4.9	1.9	6.8	.0	9.3	5.3	2.2	5.1
Sha Tin	1.6	.0	6.8	3.6	6.8	4.5	.0	3.9
Tai Po	.0	.0	.0	.0	2.5	2.3	2.2	1.4
Tsuen Wan	1.6	1.9	4.5	.0	1.7	2.3	.0	1.8
Kwai Tsing	3.3	1.9	2.3	1.8	1.7	6.8	.0	3.1
Tuen Mun	4.9	3.8	.0	.0	2.5	3.8	8.7	3.3
Yuen Long	.0	.0	.0	3.6	7.6	2.3	2.2	2.9
More than one district	19.7	13.5	4.5	5.4	11.9	10.6	15.2	11.6
(N)	(61)	(52)	(44)	(56)	(118)	(132)	(46)	(509)

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

Events taking place at government buildings, Chinese government-related authorities, business/industrial places, consulates, schools and other in-door public places were excluded.

The Central and Western District, where Government House, Central Government Offices and Legco are located, was definitely the most popular spot for collective action. About 17.3% of all conflict events took place in this district. Yet, the proportions varied significantly during the period under study. The highest proportions

were observed in 2002 (37%), 1999 (30.4%) and 1998 (27.3%), while the lowest were in 1996 (9.8%) and 2001 (10.6%).

Next in the list are the districts of Yau Tsim Mong and Wan Chai. The proportions of social conflict events occurring in these districts were 16.3% and 14.9%, respectively.

Southern District and Eastern District on Hong Kong Island; Sham Shui Po and Kowloon City in Kowloon; and Tai Po and Tsuen Wan in the New Territories can be characterized as comparatively tranquil. The respective percentages of social conflicts located in these districts were only 1.2%, 1.4%, 1.6%, 2%, 1.4% and 1.8%. About one-tenth (11.6%) of the total out-of-door conflict events took place in more than one district.

On the whole, 15.6% took place elsewhere, including at consulates in Hong Kong (5.6%), schools (1.5%), the airport, hospitals and churches (see Table 2).

Magnitude and Intensity

The magnitude and intensity of a social conflict event are estimated with regard to its duration; number of initiators, participants and parties involved; number of other persons affected; degree of violence, including the maximum form of violence against persons, the maximum damage against property and the maximum force of government repression used; and the number of arrests made and casualties incurred. Generally speaking, the degree 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 the amount of damage caused, and the number of arrests made and casualties incurred.

Duration

People participating in a collective action usually do so for certain particular instrumental and/or expressive reasons. The cost, in terms of energy, emotion, time, political risk, or other, of participation is generally negatively related to the duration of the collective conflict. To the outsider, and sometimes even to the insider, the beginning and the end of an event of 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 end implicitly. Yet, many collective struggles are long-term efforts with only intermittent, overt interactions between contending parties. Students of social conflict have to demarcate, at times arbitrarily, the beginning and end of every conflict event so as to assess other properties, such as the outcome, of the event. In coding the duration of the recorded events of social conflict, we followed the 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, 8.7% of the recorded social conflicts were of unknown duration. The highest proportion was found in 1999 (19.3%), and the lowest in 2000 (4.4%).

Our sample of social conflicts shows that the duration of the majority of collective actions was very short. They seldom lasted for more than a day. Over eight out of ten (83.1%) recorded events lasted less than half a day. About 5.9% lasted half a day to one day, 1.1% two days, .2% three days and 1% four days or more (see Table 4). The longest event was an Internet signature campaign entitled "No Pnets for Students." The campaign, launched by a F. 7 student, ran from July 1998 to February 1999 and secured support from over 2,600 students. The next longest was staged by mainland right-of-abode-seekers and supporters in Chater Garden from January to April 2002.¹²

Number of Initiators, Participants and Parties Involved

The number of participants in a social conflict is one of its most visible attributes. Numbers are crucial not only to attract the attention of the media and public, but also for mobilization and development. The gathering of a large number of supporters may generate a sense of power, strengthening the belief that a grievance can be redressed or a goal can be attained. Empirical studies of 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

Table 4 Estimated Duration of Social Conflict Events (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Less than 1/2 day ¹	79.2	83.2	74.7	71.6	90.6	86.2	83.8	83.1
1/2 - 1 day	11.1	5.8	12.9	5.5	4.1	2.9	4.5	5.9
2 days	1.7	1.4	1.7	1.4	.5	1.0	1.0	1.1
3 days	.5	.0	.3	.0	.3	.4	.0	.2
4 days or more	1.0	.5	1.4	2.2	.1	1.4	.6	1.0
Unknown	6.4	9.1	8.9	19.3	4.4	8.2	10.2	8.7
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

1. Open letters to the contending parties were included in the category of "less than 1/2 day."

of attaining the group's objective, and the greater the willingness of individuals to join in the action.

Tables 5 and 6 summarize the overall pattern as well as the year-to-year variations in the estimated numbers of initiators and participants. Newspaper reporting does not generally reflect the importance of this attribute. On the whole, 20.7% of our collection of newspaper reports on social conflict did not mention the number of initiators, and 42.4% did not mention the number of participants. It should also be noted that most of the available information was estimated roughly.

Apart from those with an unknown number of initiators, the pattern is clear and consistent: most of the recorded social conflicts were initiated by named associations instead of individual persons; conflicts without initiators were extremely rare. For example, while 86.6% of the contentious events were initiated by named associations, only 12.8% were initiated by individual persons and only .5% were identified as having no initiators (see Table 5).

The percentages of social conflicts with an unknown number of participants ranged from 33.4% (1996) to 48.6% (1997). Excluding

Table 5 Estimated Number of Initiators (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
None	2.2	.0	.9	1.1	.1	.0	.0	.5
1	4.5	3.8	2.6	4.1	10.5	10.5	6.1	7.1
2-5	.5	.8	.6	1.4	4.6	2.5	1.9	2.2
6-10	1.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.6	.3	.3
11 and more	.5	.0	.3	.8	.4	.9	.6	.5
Named associations ¹	70.0	80.2	67.8	71.1	62.8	69.3	64.6	68.7
Unknown	21.3	15.1	27.9	21.5	21.6	16.2	26.4	20.7
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

1. A total of 56 events were initiated by both named associations and individuals.

Table 6 Estimated Number of Participants (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
None	2.0	1.4	.9	.6	4.2	3.7	1.9	2.6
1-10	12.1	11.3	6.6	4.7	7.2	7.9	8.0	8.1
11-20	11.6	9.3	9.5	8.0	7.5	8.9	8.9	8.9
21-50	15.6	11.3	14.9	9.4	11.3	13.0	13.4	12.6
51-100	7.9	4.1	8.3	7.4	12.8	8.7	9.2	9.0
101-500	10.1	10.4	10.1	13.2	9.9	10.2	12.7	10.7
501-1000	3.0	1.6	1.4	4.4	2.2	2.0	2.2	2.3
1001-5000	2.5	1.1	2.9	3.6	2.5	1.7	4.1	2.5
5001-20000	.7	.3	.3	.3	.4	.6	.3	.4
20001 and more	1.0	.5	.3	1.4	.1	.4	.6	.5
Unknown	33.4	48.6	44.8	47.1	42.0	42.9	38.5	42.4
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

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.

these unknown cases, over half (55.8%) of the collective actions involved 50 participants or fewer — 18.6% had 10 or fewer, 15.4% had 11 to 20, and 21.8% had 21 to 50 participants. The highest proportions of conflicts involving 50 participants or fewer were in 1997 (64.7%) and 1996 (62.1%), while the lowest were in 1999 (42.7%) and 2000 (52%). Contentious actions with a large number of participants were infrequent. During the whole period under study, only 6% of the conflicts mobilized over 1,000 persons to participate (see Table 6).¹³

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

One party involved in the conflict is called the target party, against which aggrieved participants make their claims. Another potential participant is the mediator of the conflict. The aggrieved parties involved in a social conflict can be classified into three types: the alignments, the independents and the antagonists. 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 aligned. If two or more parties take part in the same event and act independently to pursue the same goal, we classify them as independents. If two or more parties involved in the same event hold incompatible views or goals on the issue in contention and act in an opposing manner to pursue their own goals, we name them antagonists. The involvement of bystander parties as allies generally increases the resources and ability of the claim-making party to attain its goal, but the presence of antagonists is usually detrimental to its bargaining power.

Table 7 summarizes the estimated number of aggrieved parties involved in our account of social conflicts. Only a small number of news accounts do not cover this aspect of conflicts — 3.2% for the number of alignments, .2% for independents and .2% for antagonists.

Table 7 Estimated Number of Parties Involved (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Alignments								
None	88.4	84.9	84.2	85.1	86.5	84.3	84.7	85.5
1-5	7.2	7.7	9.8	7.7	8.0	10.1	7.0	8.4
6-10	1.2	1.1	1.7	1.1	1.6	1.6	1.3	1.4
11 and more	.7	.8	.6	1.4	1.6	1.6	2.9	1.4
Unknown	2.5	5.5	3.7	4.7	2.3	2.4	4.1	3.2
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)
Independents								
None	98.3	98.6	98.3	98.3	98.0	97.9	98.7	98.2
1	.7	.3	.6	.8	.8	1.0	1.3	.8
2 and more	.2	.8	1.1	.8	1.0	.9	.0	.8
Unknown	.7	.3	.0	.0	.3	.2	.0	.2
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)
Antagonists								
None	99.0	98.4	99.4	97.2	99.6	99.8	99.4	99.1
1	.7	1.4	.6	1.4	.4	.2	.6	.6
2 and more	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Unknown	.2	.3	.0	1.4	.0	.0	.0	.2
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Over the years, the proportions of collective actions with an unknown number of alignments ranged from 2.3% (2000) to 5.5% (1997).

On the whole, only one claim-making party was involved in the conflict in 85.5% of the recorded events. About 8.4% had one to five alignments, 1.4% had six to ten alignments and 1.4% had more than ten alignments. The occurrence of social conflicts with a larger number of alignments (i.e., more than ten) seems to have become slightly more common in recent years. For example, excluding the

unknown cases, the proportions of conflict events with more than ten parties in alignment amounted to 3% in 2002 and 1.7% in 2000 and 2001, while the respective figures for 1996, 1997 and 1998 were .8%, .9% and .6%.¹⁴

The presence of independents and antagonists in a contentious action was very rare. In the period 1996 to 2002, social conflicts with independents and antagonists amounted to merely 1.6% and .6%, respectively, of all the events.¹⁵

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. On the whole, nearly one-third (31.7%) of the news reports provided insufficient information. In a given year, the proportions ranged widely from 14.8% (1997) to 40.9% (2001).

As reported by the press, it seems that the majority of collective actions were confined to participants in the conflict. In this data set, only six cases reportedly affected non-participants. An example of impact on non-participants occurred when 150 non-franchised bus drivers staged a protest against the Transport Department's control of the non-franchised bus business, and caused chaos during peak-hour traffic in Central and Wan Chai.¹⁶

Table 8 Estimated Number of Other Persons Affected (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
None	84.4	85.2	81.9	64.7	60.1	59.0	59.2	68.1
1-100	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
101 and more	.5	.0	.0	.6	.1	.1	.0	.2
Unknown	15.1	14.8	18.1	34.7	39.7	40.9	40.8	31.7
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Degree of Violence

Unruliness and violence are probably the most conspicuous actions taken to attract publicity to a cause as well as to attract the attention of the target party and to provoke a response. However, as reported by many empirical studies on conflict, the use of violence is counterproductive for both contending parties. For example, the organizational effort of the weaker protesting party is compromised when its violent action is met with overwhelming force. For the stronger party, high repressive action may, in the longer run, be detrimental to its public support and solidify the weaker party by creating martyrs. Besides, the degree of consistency,¹⁷ instead of severity, is found to be more crucial in the use of coercion by a conflict party that is claiming jurisdiction over its adversary.

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

In a very large number of conflict events, the occurrence of violence was very infrequent. Large-scale collective actions, such as mass processions and demonstrations, were generally peaceful. Table 9 shows that only 3.3% of the total recorded conflicts involved minor physical interactions such as pushing, scuffling and jostling; .3% fist-fighting; .2% throwing of objects; and .1% combat with weapons.

Two of the four events involving combat with weapons occurred in detention centres for Vietnamese boat people,¹⁸ one in Shek Wu San Tsuen, Sheung Shui,¹⁹ and one in front of the Central Government Offices.²⁰

Likewise, property damage resulting from social conflicts was extremely rare (see Table 10). From 1996 to 2002, only 1.6% of the recorded conflicts were reported to have resulted in property damage. Among these events, an absolute majority (87.5%, 49 events) occurred unintentionally, while 3.6% (2 events) involved the conversion of property and 8.9% (5 events) the intentional destruction of property.²¹

Table 11 suggests that the government has exercised self-control when dealing with popular collective action. First, on average, 34.5%

Table 9 Maximum Form of Violence against Persons (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No violence	93.3	95.9	94.3	94.5	97.6	97.4	95.5	96.0
Pushing, scuffling, jostling	5.4	3.6	5.2	4.1	1.9	2.0	4.5	3.3
Fist-fighting	.2	.3	.0	.3	.3	.5	.0	.3
Throwing objects	.5	.0	.3	.6	.1	.1	.0	.2
Combat with weapons	.5	.0	.0	.6	.0	.0	.0	.1
Unknown	.0	.3	.3	.0	.1	.0	.0	.1
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Table 10 Maximum Damage against Property (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No damage	96.3	98.9	97.4	97.2	98.4	99.4	99.7	98.3
Unintentional property damage	3.2	1.1	2.3	1.9	1.5	.6	.0	1.4
Conversion, intentional destruction	.5	.0	.3	.6	.1	.0	.3	.2
Unknown	.0	.0	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

of the social conflicts were reported to have no police in attendance. Second, the involvement of police in contentious action was largely confined to routine capacities (54.1%) and surveillance (6.4%). Over the years, the active engagement of police was uncommon. On the whole, 1.1% of the news accounts reported police patrolling among protesting participants with non-injury-causing equipment (for example, tear gas, pepper spray and fire hoses) and .1% (2 events) with more serious equipment (for example, clubs and dogs).²²

Table 11 Maximum Force of Government Repression (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No police	37.1	20.3	25.6	22.0	41.0	42.1	36.3	34.5
Police present in routine capacities	52.0	72.8	59.8	57.9	53.7	43.0	53.5	54.1
Police surveillance	4.7	5.2	5.7	16.5	4.2	5.6	6.4	6.4
Police involvement, with non-injury-causing equipment	3.7	.3	2.0	1.7	.1	.9	.3	1.1
Police involvement, with serious equipment	.2	.0	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.1
Police involvement, with lethal weapons	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Unknown	2.2	1.4	6.9	1.7	1.0	8.4	3.5	3.8
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

There were no reports of police engaging in battle with protesters using lethal weapons. No significant change in this characteristic 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, injuries and arrests that allegedly occurred in the course of, or in the immediate aftermath of, the social conflict events. Therefore, our data should only be regarded as minimums of the total figures.

Table 12 shows the percentage of conflict events that resulted in casualties and arrests, as well as the total number of persons killed, injured and arrested. In line with the uncommon use of violence in social conflicts, our sample reveals that only one of the recorded events resulted in fatalities and a negligible proportion of people were arrested or injured.²³

Table 12 Social Conflict Events Resulting in Casualties and Arrests (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Persons killed								
Initiators	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Participants	.0	.0	.0	.0	.1 (1)	.0	.0	.0 (1)
Third-party persons	.0	.0	.0	.0	.1 (1)	.0	.0	.0 (1)
Others	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Persons injured								
Initiators	.0	.0	.3 (1)	.0	.1 (1)	.2 (2)	.3 (1)	.1 (5)
Participants	3.0 (31)	.3 (1)	.6 (4)	1.1 (21)	.8 (40)	.1 (1)	1.0 (29)	.9 (127)
Third-party persons	.0	.0	.3 (1)	.0	.1 (22)	.0	.0	.1 (23)
Others	.0	.6 (6)	.0	.6 (6)	.0	.1 (1)	.0	.2 (13)
Persons arrested								
Initiators	.0	.3 (1)	.0	.0	.1 (1)	.1 (7)	.0	.1 (9)
Participants	2.0 (160)	.8 (12)	1.4 (41)	1.1 (21)	.2 (7)	.6 (22)	1.3 (28)	.9 (291)
Third-party persons	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Others	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0

Notes: Figures in parentheses denote total number of persons.
The numbers of police killed, injured and arrested in the events were excluded.

From 1996 to June 2002, we found only five conflict events in which five of the initiators were wounded, and .1% in which the initiators were arrested (nine persons in three different events).²⁴

Percentages of conflicts over the entire period that resulted in participants injured and arrested were both .9% (29 and 31 conflict events, respectively).²⁵

Injuries and arrests of third-party persons and non-participants rarely occurred. Only .2% (13 persons in five events) of the recorded conflicts resulted in the injury of non-participants. Two conflicts resulted in the injury of 23 third-party persons.²⁶ No third-party person or non-participant was arrested.

Issues in Contention

In this study, social conflict is defined as contending collectivities interacting in a coercive manner. Contending parties generally believe that they have, or are going to have, conflicting goals that are worth striving for. The basic issues in contention have been 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 was assessed by the extent of the impact for which the conflicting goal is aiming. Scope was classified by six within-Hong Kong categories — territory-wide, regional, district, vicinity, specific organization or person, and sectoral — and three outside-Hong Kong categories — China-related, overseas and global.

Nature of Issues in Contention

In Table 13, a general picture of the major issues in contention during the period from 1996 to June 2002 is portrayed. Conflicts relating to “civil rights and liberties,” “labour and employment” and “housing” ranked first, second and third, respectively, by number of occurrences. Four out of ten (40.5%) contentious actions in this study were related to these three major issues — civil rights and liberties

Table 13 Nature of Major Issues in Contention (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total	Rank
Civil rights and liberties	13.4	26.6	14.7	23.7	14.8	7.1	23.6	15.8	1
Communication media	.7	.8	2.3	2.8	2.2	1.1	3.5	1.8	14
Culture and religion	22.0	12.6	9.2	19.3	8.9	10.3	5.7	12.1	4
Economics	1.0	2.2	17.8	5.0	7.7	8.6	8.9	7.4	5
Education	2.7	3.8	2.6	5.2	5.1	5.5	4.8	4.5	8
Environment	1.5	.5	2.3	3.9	4.7	3.9	5.4	3.4	10
Health and medical services	1.5	.8	2.9	.8	1.0	.9	.3	1.1	17
Housing	13.4	14.0	14.4	8.3	13.2	12.5	7.0	12.1	3
Labour and employment	10.4	12.4	15.2	9.1	11.9	14.0	15.0	12.6	2
Legal and judicial	7.7	7.4	2.0	1.7	2.4	2.1	1.6	3.3	11
Police, military and public order	1.0	.5	.9	1.9	2.3	4.1	1.9	2.2	13
Politics and government	7.9	4.1	4.9	4.7	6.8	10.0	7.0	7.0	6
Public works and utilities	.7	.3	1.1	.8	2.7	1.9	1.0	1.5	16
Social welfare	3.7	4.9	2.0	4.4	2.8	2.1	2.5	3.0	12
Transport	4.5	4.1	3.2	5.2	6.1	9.5	5.1	6.0	7
Urban planning and development	6.2	1.9	2.0	1.9	5.9	2.9	3.8	3.8	9
Urban services	.0	1.4	2.0	1.4	1.0	2.4	2.9	1.8	15
Vietnamese boat people	1.7	1.4	.3	.0	.4	.0	.0	.5	18
Unknown	.0	.0	.3	.0	.3	.4	.0	.2	
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)	

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

matters accounted for 15.8% (536 events) of the conflicts, labour and employment matters took up 12.6% (426 events), and housing matters were the subject of another 12.1% (411 events).

Conflicts about culture and religion came fourth and made up 12.1% (408 events) of all the recorded events. Following that issue were conflicts pertaining to economics and politics and government, with respective percentages of 7.4 (250 events) and 7 (237 events). Issues concerning transport and education accounted for 6% (203 events) and 4.5% (152 events), respectively, of all events.

Other issues, such as urban planning and development, environment, legal and judicial, social welfare, public order, communication media, urban services, public works and utilities, health and medical services, and Vietnamese boat people each were the subject of only .5% to 3.8% of all the recorded conflict events.

The six most frequent conflict issues are presented in more detail in the following sections.

Conflicts over Civil Rights

In line with our previous study, civil rights continued to be one of the most common conflict issues. During the period under study, 536 events of that nature were reported. While conflicts pertaining to mainland issues were once the focal concern in the late 1980s and early 1990s,²⁷ this category of event has decreased gradually in recent years. In this study, it was counted under the category of “others.” As indicated in Table 14, with the exception of 1996 and 1998, this category of conflicts constituted about one-third of the recorded conflicts of a civil rights nature.

Most of the civil rights-related contentious actions involved the issue of mainlanders’ right of abode in Hong Kong. On the whole, this issue accounted for 28% of all conflicts concerning civil rights matters. As expected, this issue was relatively insignificant before 1999. Of these events, over nine out of ten occurred after the Court of Final Appeal (hereafter, CFA) handed down its judgement, on 29 January 1999, that only if a parent had the right of abode in Hong Kong would his/her children, legitimate or not, be entitled to that right. On 26 June, at the request of the Hong Kong government who

Table 14 Conflicts over Civil Rights according to Issue (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Right of abode in HK	7.4	8.2	2.0	52.3	22.2	38.6	59.5	28.0
Freedom of assembly	5.6	28.9	21.6	2.3	20.5	12.3	17.6	16.4
Freedom of speech/press	7.4	1.0	3.9	3.5	12.0	1.8	10.8	6.2
Freedom of movement	5.6	2.1	.0	2.3	2.6	8.8	.0	2.8
Academic freedom	.0	.0	.0	.0	12.8	.0	.0	2.8
Consumer rights	3.7	.0	.0	2.3	.0	.0	.0	.7
Freedom of occupation	.0	1.0	.0	.0	.9	.0	.0	.4
Human rights	5.6	21.6	3.9	3.5	5.1	5.3	2.7	7.5
Others ¹	64.8	37.1	68.6	33.7	23.9	33.3	9.5	35.3
(N)	(54)	(97)	(51)	(86)	(117)	(57)	(74)	(536)

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

1. Includes mainland issues.

feared that the CFA's ruling would have allowed an estimated 1.67 million mainlanders to settle in the territory, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (hereafter, NPCSC) reinterpreted the relevant provisions of the Basic Law.²⁸ Various kinds of collective protests were then staged by the right-of-abode seekers, in conjunction with their families and supporters, to fight for their rights and to refuse deportation. The proportions of such conflicts were significantly higher in 2002 (59.5%) and 1999 (52.3%).

Contentious actions regarding the freedom of assembly made up 16.4% of all conflicts of a civil rights nature. The highest proportions were observed in 1997 (28.9%) and 1998 (21.6%), with the lowest in 1999 (2.3%) and 1996 (5.6%).

Conflicts focusing on the freedom of speech and of the press constituted 6.2% of the recorded civil rights-related conflicts. These events were particularly salient in 2000 (12%) and 2002 (10.8%).

Freedom of movement, academic freedom,²⁹ consumer rights and freedom of occupation had not been raised as major issues of

collective contention. Each constituted 2.8%, 2.8%, .7% and .4%, respectively, of our account of conflicts of a civil rights nature.

Another 7.5% of these conflicts concerned the issue of human rights in general. This kind of collective action peaked in 1997 (21.6%) and has become less frequent since 1998.

Conflicts over Labour and Employment

In a capitalist society such as Hong Kong, employment is the main key to opportunities in life. 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 recent years. During the period from 1991 to 2001, the proportion of the working population in the manufacturing sector dwindled further from 28.2% to 12.3%. The overall labour force participation rate dropped from 64.3% to 61.4%, with that for males decreasing significantly from 78.7% to 71.9% (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:117-21). The unemployment rate soared from 1.3% in 1990 and 2.2% in 1997 to 6.2% in 1999 (Census and Statistics Department, 2000: ix; 2001:ix) and 7.1% in February-April 2002 (http://www.daoheng.com/chin/kd1_c.htm). In the transformation from an industrial to a service economy, some segments of workers have been cast out of the market. The least-educated and the elderly are the hardest-hit. Those who have stayed in the market also suffer from feelings of job insecurity, as well as a sense of decline in quality of life.

Against this backdrop, the present data reveal that labour and employment remained a common collective concern, with reports of 426 events in 6.5 years (see Table 15).

Nearly seven out of ten (66.7%) labour-related conflicts involved the private sector — 35% were related to blue-collar workers, 10.3% to the issue of foreign or imported labour, 9.4% to white-collar workers and 12% to both blue-collar and white-collar workers as well as other problems. Conflicts concerning blue-collar workers have become more common since 2000. For example, from January to June 2002, 59.6% of all the recorded labour-related conflicts involved this segment of workers, whereas the respective percentage in 1997 was merely 13.3. On the contrary, collective actions relating to the

issue of foreign or imported labour have dropped drastically since 2000 (for example, from 28.6% in 1996 to less than 3% in 2000, 2001 and 2002).

Public sector employees had been rather active in collective action in the early 1990s. Over one-third of the recorded conflicts of a labour nature involved this segment of the working population (Lau and Wan, 1997:33). This kind of conflict subsided in the late 1990s but regained its force after 2000. On the whole, however, only 15.5% of all labour-related conflicts were related to the public sector, and the majority of them have taken place in recent years.

Collective actions concerning the central provident fund as well as the employment of children and women were relatively infrequent.

Table 15 Conflicts over Labour and Employment according to Sector (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Public sector								
Blue-collar workers	.0	2.2	1.9	.0	9.6	7.1	2.1	4.7
White-collar workers	.0	4.4	.0	3.0	5.3	9.8	.0	4.5
All workers	4.8	2.2	.0	.0	8.5	7.1	17.0	6.3
Private sector								
Blue-collar workers	26.2	13.3	30.2	21.2	40.4	38.4	59.6	35.0
White-collar workers	2.4	2.2	11.3	24.2	6.4	15.2	2.1	9.4
Foreign/imported labour	28.6	20.0	15.1	30.3	1.1	2.7	2.1	10.3
All workers	.0	6.7	22.6	18.2	11.7	11.6	12.8	12.0
General								
Central provident fund	9.5	13.3	1.9	.0	6.4	1.8	.0	4.5
Children and women	2.4	.0	1.9	3.0	.0	.0	.0	.7
All workers	19.0	31.1	11.3	.0	3.2	4.5	2.1	8.7
Others	7.1	4.4	3.8	.0	7.4	1.8	2.1	4.0
(N)	(42)	(45)	(53)	(33)	(94)	(112)	(47)	(426)

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

Of all the recorded labour-related events, only 4.5% were related to the issue of the central provident fund and .7% to the employment of children and women.

Excluding the conflicts pertaining to foreign or imported labour, the employment of children and women and the central provident fund, 61.7% of collective actions of a labour nature were concerned with wages, benefits and other conditions of work. This kind of conflict was relatively more common in 1999 and 2000, with respective proportions of 81.8% and 78.2% (see Table 16).

On average, only 21.1% of the conflicts concerned industrial relations and labour unions, and 5.6% were related to labour hazards and safety. But it is obvious that labour conflicts involving industrial relations and labour unions have risen in importance since 2001 (see Table 16).

Conflicts over Housing

Over the past decade, the proportion of Hong Kong households residing in public rental flats declined markedly from 36.5% in 1991 to 30.6% in 2001, while that living in Housing Authority (hereafter, HA) subsidized sale flats increased significantly from 7.3% to 14.8%

Table 16 Conflicts over Labour and Employment according to Issue (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Wages, benefits, conditions of work	32.0	26.7	74.4	81.8	78.2	57.0	58.7	61.7
Industrial relations, labour unions	20.0	56.7	2.3	4.5	1.1	32.7	34.8	21.1
Labour hazards and safety	16.0	6.7	9.3	9.1	1.1	5.6	2.2	5.6
Career services, training	4.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.3
Others	28.0	10.0	14.0	4.5	19.5	4.7	4.3	11.5
(N)	(25)	(30)	(43)	(22)	(87)	(107)	(46)	(360)

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

(Census and Statistics Department, 2002:164). There was a total of 411 conflict events relating to various kinds of housing issues. Table 17 gives the breakdown of these conflicts according to housing type. Over six out of ten (61.7%) social conflicts over housing involved public housing — 44% over HA rental flats, 14.1% over HA subsidized sale flats and 3.6% involving Housing Society (hereafter, HS) flats.

Among the collective actions relating to HA rental flats, the distribution of the major sources of conflict was, as follows:

Allocation	26.0%
Rents	26.0%
Provision	3.9%
Quality, facilities and others	36.4%
Both/all of the above	7.8%

As expected, conflicts relating to HA subsidized sale flats have become more common in recent years. While this kind of event constituted only 3.7% of all housing-related conflicts in 1996, the percentage rose to 21 in 2001.³⁰

Even though nearly half of Hong Kong households reside in private housing, only 14.6% of housing conflicts were related

Table 17 Conflicts over Housing according to Housing Type (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Public housing								
HA rental flats	38.9	49.0	24.0	50.0	39.4	53.0	63.6	44.0
HA subsidized sale flats	3.7	9.8	18.0	10.0	15.4	21.0	9.1	14.1
HS flats	5.6	3.9	10.0	3.3	1.0	2.0	4.5	3.6
Private housing	5.6	9.8	28.0	10.0	22.1	11.0	4.5	14.6
Temporary housing	27.8	3.9	6.0	10.0	11.5	5.0	9.1	10.2
Others	18.5	23.5	14.0	16.7	10.6	8.0	9.1	13.4
(N)	(54)	(51)	(50)	(30)	(104)	(100)	(22)	(411)

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

specifically to this type of housing.³¹ With the exception of 1998 and 2000, the occurrence of this kind of conflict was relatively infrequent. The major sources of discontent involving private housing were:

Rents, prices	37.3%
Management	5.9%
Quality, facilities and others	56.9%

The proportion of households living in temporary housing was only 1.2% (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:164), yet collective actions concerning this type of housing constituted 10.2% of all the recorded events. The highest proportion was observed in 1996 (27.8%), with the lowest in 1997 (3.9%).³²

Conflicts over Culture and Religion

Hong Kong is a comparatively free society as regards the flow of information, culture and religion. According to Friedmann (1995:24), Hong Kong is one of the 30 “world cities” in the world that “are basing points and control centres for the interdependent skein of financial and cultural flows which, together, support and sustain the globalization of industry” (Knox, 1995:6-7).

Our collection of social conflict events recorded a total of 408 events which were related to issues of culture and religion. As indicated in Table 18, the majority (62.3%) of these events were concerned with nationalism. Among them, most were protests against the violation of Chinese sovereignty over the Diaoyutai islands by the Japanese government and other events that symbolized the revival of Japanese militarism. In 1998, a number of collective actions, including open letters, candlelight vigils, demonstrations and mass processions, were staged to protest against attacks on ethnic Chinese, who control much of the Indonesian economy and who were the major target of the riots in Indonesia in May of that year, which led to the downfall of President Suharto.

While conflicts concerning nationalism seem to be showing a downward trend in recent years, the occurrence of collective disputes relating to religious matters have become more frequent than ever. While these events, on average, constituted 10.3% of all the recorded culture-related conflicts, they had been practically non-existent before

1999. Most of these collective actions involved the Falun Gong, a group that has been banned as an illegal organization in mainland China since July 1999. These events peaked in 2001 (31.3%) when in February the Chief Executive described the Falun Gong, which had not committed any breach of Hong Kong law, as having the characteristics of an evil cult.

Contentious actions concerning gender issues have never been a major issue. They took up only 6.9% of all culture-related conflicts. And, with the exception of 2002, the occurrence of gender conflicts was relatively stable, with two to five events a year.³³

By contrast, conflicts pertaining to gambling rose after 1999 and made up another 6.6% of all culture-related conflicts. These collective contentions, which were aroused by the proposed legalization of soccer gambling, peaked in 2001 (22.9%).

Conflicts concerning racial issues, social discrimination, cultural policies and regulations, traditional beliefs and practices, language, etc., took place only sporadically.

Table 18 Conflicts over Culture and Religion according to Issue (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Nationalism	91.0	89.1	65.6	75.7	48.6	27.7	5.6	62.3
Religion	.0	.0	.0	5.7	12.9	31.3	16.7	10.3
Gender	3.4	6.5	6.3	7.1	7.1	4.8	33.3	6.9
Gambling	.0	.0	.0	2.9	4.3	22.9	16.7	6.6
Race	.0	.0	28.1	1.4	1.4	3.6	.0	3.4
Discrimination ¹	2.2	.0	.0	1.4	5.7	1.2	.0	2.0
Others	3.4	4.3	.0	5.7	20.0	8.4	27.8	8.6
(N)	(89)	(46)	(32)	(70)	(70)	(83)	(18)	(408)

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

1. Discrimination against the elderly or physically/mentally disabled.

Conflicts over Economic Conditions

As stated by the Chief Executive at the Swearing-in Ceremony for his second term of government on 1 July 2002: "Fellow citizens, I fully appreciate that after some 30 years of rapid economic growth, it is very difficult for us to accept the current economic stagnation, continued deflation, rising unemployment, falling salaries and wages, and a sizeable budget deficit." Our collection of social conflict events recorded a total of 250 events relating to various issues of an economic nature. The occurrence of economic conflicts was undoubtedly related to the deteriorating economic condition of the territory.

As shown in Table 19, issues related to unemployment and the tertiary economy constituted the major subjects of collective action involving economic matters. Nearly half of the recorded economic conflicts belonged to these two categories — 24% were related to unemployment and 23.6% to the tertiary economy. Conflicts pertaining to the tertiary economy involved a wide range of issues. For example, on 16 December 2001, the Newspaper Hawkers Alliance and about

Table 19 Conflicts over Economic Conditions according to Issue (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Unemployment	.0	12.5	38.7	50.0	4.9	21.7	28.6	24.0
Tertiary economy	.0	12.5	29.0	.0	29.5	20.3	28.6	23.6
Taxation	.0	50.0	11.3	.0	11.5	15.9	10.7	12.8
Primary economy	75.0	.0	6.5	22.2	19.7	4.3	.0	10.4
Standard of living	.0	.0	3.2	5.6	16.4	14.5	3.6	9.6
Other public finance	.0	.0	1.6	11.1	6.6	.0	25.0	5.6
Government regulation	25.0	12.5	4.8	5.6	1.6	4.3	.0	4.0
Others	.0	12.5	4.8	5.6	9.8	18.8	3.6	10.0
(N)	(4)	(8)	(62)	(18)	(61)	(69)	(28)	(250)

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

200 hawkers from Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi launched a campaign to pressure two convenience store chains, namely 7-Eleven and Circle K, to stop offering discounts on newspapers and magazines. The coalition claimed to have the support of about 5,000 newspaper hawkers from across Hong Kong.

Taxation came third by number of occurrences and took up 12.8% of the economic conflicts.³⁴

Although less than 1% of the working population engage in agriculture and fishing (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:136), collective disputes concerning the primary economy made up 10.4% of all economic conflicts.³⁵

Contentious events relating to standard of living, public finance and budget, and government regulation were less frequent. Each constituted 9.6%, 5.6% and 4%, respectively, of the total recorded economic conflicts.³⁶

Conflicts over Politics

The transfer of sovereignty was accompanied by the onset of financial turmoil in Asia, an economic downturn, a string of incidents of administrative incompetence, a proliferation of reform initiatives that failed to galvanize public support but offended many vested interests, declining public trust in the government and a surge in socio-political cynicism. In this context, a total of 237 conflict events concerning political issues were reported during the period under study.

Table 20 gives a summary of these conflicts of a political nature. Of all the recorded events, an absolute majority were related to local affairs.

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. According to the news accounts, collective actions over government performance and administration made up nearly half (44.7%) of the reported political events. This phenomenon is significantly different from that found in our previous study. The present data set also shows an upward trend in recent years. For

Table 20 Conflicts over Politics according to Issue (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Internal affairs								
Gov't performance ¹	6.3	6.7	58.8	64.7	68.5	51.3	18.2	44.7
Voting, representation ²	53.1	46.7	23.5	17.6	20.4	23.8	50.0	30.4
Political reform	3.1	.0	11.8	11.8	.0	5.0	9.1	4.6
Personnel	.0	6.7	.0	.0	1.9	1.3	.0	1.3
Political parties/groups	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.9	2.5	.0	1.3
External affairs								
International affairs	9.4	.0	5.9	.0	.0	10.0	18.2	6.8
HK-mainland affairs	.0	13.3	.0	.0	.0	2.5	4.5	2.1
Others ³	28.1	26.7	.0	5.9	7.4	3.8	.0	8.9
(N)	(32)	(15)	(17)	(17)	(54)	(80)	(22)	(237)

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

1. Includes 36 events on civil service reform and 2 events on the support of Tung Chee-hwa.
2. Includes 33 events on the election of the Chief Executive and 10 events on the Selection Committee.
3. Includes 5 events on Hong Kong-Taiwan affairs; 3 events on mainland China-Taiwan affairs; 1 event on Hong Kong-United Kingdom affairs and 1 event on Hong Kong-Macau affairs.

example, while conflicts concerning government performance and administration took up 6.3% of all political conflicts in 1996, the respective percentage in 2000 jumped to 68.5.

As the political system of the new regime is perceived by the public as less democratic than the one before the regime transfer, issues relating to voting and representation stood out as the second most frequently contentious political problem. Nearly one-third (30.4%) of all the recorded political conflicts concerned these issues. Such conflicts were more salient in 1996 and 1997, as well as in 2002, with respective percentages of 53.1, 46.7 and 50.³⁷ Yet, only 4.6% of

the conflicts of a political nature were related to the issue of political reform.³⁸

Problems concerning the selection, recruitment and appointment of government personnel as well as those involving political parties and political groups have not been a hot issue for collective action. Each took up only 1.3% of the total recorded political conflicts.

Before 1997, nearly four out of ten of the accounts of political conflict pertained to external affairs.³⁹ After the handover, this kind of collective dispute dropped drastically to around one-tenth of all the recorded political conflicts. Of those, 2.1% were related to Hong Kong-mainland China relations and 6.8% to international relations.⁴⁰

Scope of Issues in Contention

As shown in Table 21, nearly nine out of ten (85.9%) contentious actions were within the scope of the territory. Social conflicts aimed at a specific organization or person constituted the majority, with a report of 28.2% of all the recorded conflicts. It can be observed that this kind of event is on a rising trend. While the proportion of conflicts with such a limited scope constituted less than one-fifth of the recorded conflicts in 1996 and 1997, the respective figure has come to around one-third in recent years.

Next in frequency were collective actions directed at a sector. On average, about a quarter (25.5%) of the recorded conflict events belonged to this category. Table 22 gives further details of these events. First, nearly half (47.6%) of the conflicts were related to the dimension of work. Among these events, 13.1% were concerned with professional workers, 11.4% with public employees, 47.9% with other specific industries and 27.5% pertained to the whole working population. Second, conflicts concerning mainlanders' right of abode in Hong Kong amounted to 17.1% of all the conflicts with a sectoral scope. As mentioned before, this kind of event occurred sporadically before 1999. Nevertheless, conflicts pertaining to new immigrants took up just .9% of the recorded sectoral conflicts. Third, collective actions confined to the housing sector constituted 13% of all sectoral conflicts. Fourth, it is clear that an individual's ascribed status, such as age and sex, was not a popular basis for collective action. Of all the

Table 21 Scope of Major Issues in Contention (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Within Hong Kong								
Territory-wide	19.1	24.7	14.4	10.2	21.4	22.8	18.8	19.6
Regional	.7	.0	.3	.0	.1	.7	1.9	.5
District	1.7	2.2	2.3	2.5	3.9	4.4	3.2	3.2
Vicinity	11.1	4.7	6.3	6.6	13.8	8.1	6.4	8.9
Specific organizations/ persons	18.1	17.6	32.8	19.3	30.0	38.3	29.0	28.2
Sectoral	24.8	32.1	25.3	38.6	21.9	16.8	35.4	25.5
Outside Hong Kong								
China-related	23.3	18.1	14.9	21.8	8.4	4.7	4.1	12.1
Overseas	1.0	.5	3.4	.8	.4	2.9	1.3	1.5
Global	.0	.0	.3	.0	.0	1.1	.0	.3
Unknown	.2	.0	.0	.3	.1	.1	.0	.1
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

events, only 6% concerned age, while 2.9% were related to gender. However, we observed that the trend of contentious events concerning age fluctuated more than that concerning gender. Last, social conflicts relating to the sectors of consumers, students, political affiliations, class, religion, disabled persons, homosexuals, etc., constituted only a small proportion of sectoral conflicts, ranging from .2% (class, homosexuals) to 4.7% (students).

Contentious actions directed at the territory as a whole made up 19.6% of the recorded conflict events. The proportions of this kind of conflict peaked in 1997 (24.7%) and dropped to a nadir in 1999 (10.2%). Conflicts with a smaller territorial scope comprised about one-eighth of total conflicts — .5% with a regional scope, 3.2% a district scope and 8.9% a vicinity scope.

Table 22 Area of Sectoral Conflicts (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Work-related								
Working population	16.0	25.6	31.8	7.1	5.2	7.4	9.0	13.1
Professionals	5.0	4.3	10.2	2.9	11.6	1.5	8.1	6.3
Public employees	4.0	1.7	.0	8.6	9.8	3.0	7.2	5.4
Hawkers	.0	2.6	1.1	.0	.0	.0	.0	.5
Proprietors	.0	.0	1.1	.7	1.7	.7	.0	.7
Other occupations/ industries	24.0	5.1	27.3	18.6	32.4	26.7	13.5	21.6
Housing-related								
Public housing	13.0	16.2	8.0	6.4	3.5	17.8	4.5	9.6
Property controlled/ residents	5.0	8.5	4.5	.7	2.3	.7	1.8	3.1
Squatter area residents	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.2	.7	.0	.3
Right of abode in HK	3.0	6.8	1.1	31.4	15.0	18.5	36.9	17.1
Age	9.0	11.1	2.3	5.7	4.0	4.4	6.3	6.0
Students	6.0	6.0	4.5	4.3	4.0	3.7	5.4	4.7
Gender	4.0	2.6	2.3	2.1	2.3	2.2	5.4	2.9
Religion	.0	.0	.0	2.1	3.5	8.9	.0	2.4
Social security recipients	2.0	4.3	2.3	3.6	.0	1.5	.0	1.9
Mentally/physically disabled	2.0	1.7	1.1	.7	1.2	1.5	.9	1.3
New immigrants	3.0	1.7	.0	1.4	.6	.0	.0	.9
Consumers	.0	.9	.0	2.1	.6	.0	.0	.6
Political affiliations	1.0	.0	1.1	.7	1.2	.0	.0	.6
Class	1.0	.9	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.2
Homosexuals	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.7	.9	.2
Others	2.0	.0	1.1	.7	.0	.0	.0	.5
(N)	(100)	(117)	(88)	(140)	(173)	(135)	(111)	(864)

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

About 13.9% of all the recorded conflicts were outside the scope of Hong Kong. Among these contentious actions, an absolute majority (87%) were aimed at mainland China. This kind of conflict was literally non-existent before 1989, peaked in the year of the June 4th Incident and then decreased (Lau and Wan, 1997:47).⁴¹ In 1996, this kind of conflict still took up 23.3% of all the recorded contentious events. But after Hong Kong was returned to China, the incidence of such collective actions dropped drastically. For example, in 2001, they constituted merely 4.7% of all the recorded events.

Social conflicts with an overseas or global scope were rather infrequent and accounted for only 1.5% and .3%, respectively, of all the recorded events.

Table 23 presents a general picture of the nature of major issues in contention by the scope of the issue. It shows that, first, conflicts relating to “culture and religion” were the only issue that targeted an audience mainly outside the territory (63.7%). Second, issues that aimed at a territory-wide impact included those on the following: “legal and judicial” (52.7%), “politics and government” (50.6%) and “environment” (49.6%). Third, collective contentions that were regional, district or vicinity in scope were mostly of an “urban planning and development” (71.1%) nature. Fourth, as mentioned above, the majority of social conflicts were confined to certain sectors of the population. This is particularly true with respect to the issue of “social welfare” (76.7%). Last, most of the conflicts over “labour and employment” (65%) targeted specific organizations or persons.

Major Objectives

Conflict arises when contending parties believe that they have incompatible goals and that their goals are fully or partially attainable. Conflicting goals can differ not only in the desired end 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 24, only a negligible number of social

Table 23 Issue in Contention by Scope (%)

	Within Hong Kong			Outside Hong Kong		(N)
	Territory-wide	Regional ¹	Organizations ²	Sectoral	Mainland	Others
Civil rights and liberties	17.9	.2	24.1	29.9	26.9	1.1
Communication media	41.0	3.3	21.3	32.8	1.6	.0
Culture and religion	11.3	3.4	7.8	13.7	57.8	5.9
Economics	38.4	1.6	20.4	36.8	.4	2.4
Education	5.3	1.3	46.7	46.7	.0	.0
Environment	49.6	27.8	12.2	6.1	.9	3.5
Health and medical services	21.1	5.3	42.1	28.9	.0	2.6
Housing	9.0	31.5	29.1	30.1	.2	.0
Labour and employment	2.6	.2	65.0	31.2	.7	.2
Legal and judicial	52.7	.9	34.8	6.3	5.4	.0
Police, military and public order	12.3	21.9	46.6	11.0	4.1	4.1
Politics and government	50.6	2.5	23.2	12.7	4.6	6.3
Public works and utilities	36.0	38.0	8.0	18.0	.0	.0
Social welfare	8.7	4.9	9.7	76.7	.0	.0
Transport	24.1	36.5	16.7	22.2	.5	.0
Urban planning and development	3.9	71.1	24.2	.8	.0	.0
Urban services	6.7	36.7	36.7	20.0	.0	.0
Vietnamese boat people	43.8	31.3	25.0	.0	.0	.0

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

1. Includes district and vicinity.

2. Includes specific organizations and persons.

Table 24 Major Objective of Social Conflict Events (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Apparently random	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Damage or control ¹	.5	.0	.0	.3	.0	.1	.3	.1
Protests	63.1	53.8	40.2	55.1	46.1	52.2	51.9	51.3
Demands	34.7	42.6	58.0	41.9	48.4	43.8	46.2	45.1
Defence or support ²	1.5	1.6	.6	2.5	4.1	2.5	1.6	2.4
Others	.2	.5	.9	.3	.6	.7	.0	.5
Unknown	.0	1.1	.3	.0	.9	.6	.0	.5
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

1. Damage or control of objects, places or persons.

2. Defence or support of persons, groups or workplaces.

conflicts were of an unknown objective (.5%), without any specific objective (1 case), or aimed at damaging or controlling an object, place or person (.1%). Over half (51.3%) of the conflict events aimed to protest against some specific objects; 45.1% intended to demand something or some changes; and 2.4% were directed at the defence or support of a person, group or workplace. With the exception of 1998 and 2000, the frequency of demand conflicts was generally lower than that of protests.

Table 25 shows the breakdown of the protests by their specific object. About one-third (32.1%) of the protests were directed at particular laws, policies, policy proposals or their enforcement. Specifically, 11.7% were protests against a policy proposal, 10.5% against a law or a policy, 5.3% against the enforcement of a law or a proposal, and 4.6% against the Basic Law and its draft as well as issues related to the formation of the HKSAR government.

About one-tenth (10.7%) of the recorded protest actions involved work-related issues — 5.9% were concerned with employer's actions, 3.6% with various work conditions and only 1.2% with unemployment.

Table 25 Major Object of Protest (%)

Protest against	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Law-related								
Proposals	4.7	15.3	7.1	10.5	11.8	16.2	11.7	11.7
Laws, policies	5.9	6.6	12.1	17.5	7.4	12.6	14.1	10.5
Enforcement of laws, policies	6.3	6.1	2.9	8.0	1.9	5.3	9.2	5.3
Basic Law, formation of HKSAR gov't	14.9	16.3	.0	.5	1.9	.5	.0	4.6
Work-related								
Employer's actions	3.9	.5	5.0	5.5	7.1	7.4	9.8	5.9
Work conditions	2.4	2.0	13.6	2.0	3.6	2.4	3.7	3.6
Unemployment	.0	.0	6.4	1.5	.3	1.4	1.2	1.2
Tung Chee-hwa	.0	.0	.0	.0	.5	4.3	1.8	1.3
Other persons/parties	22.4	15.8	11.4	11.0	37.4	14.1	16.6	20.0
Acts of gov't repression	3.5	9.2	10.0	5.5	5.2	9.3	21.5	8.3
Prices	5.1	4.6	2.9	5.5	6.6	8.8	1.8	5.8
Housing issues	8.6	3.6	3.6	.5	5.5	3.1	5.5	4.4
Poverty	.4	.0	.0	.5	.5	.7	.0	.4
Gender discrimination	.0	.5	.0	1.0	.0	.5	.0	.3
Others	22.0	19.4	25.0	30.5	10.2	13.4	3.1	16.6
(N)	(255)	(196)	(140)	(200)	(364)	(419)	(163)	(1737)

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

While protests against work conditions and unemployment reached their peak in 1998 (13.6% and 6.4%, respectively) and became less frequent in recent years, protests against employer's actions rose steadily over the period under study, from 3.9% in 1996 and .5% in 1997 to 7.4% in 2001.

Protests against the actions of other persons or parties amounted to 20% of the total number of protests. Over the years, the frequency of this kind of protest fluctuated widely to constitute between 11%

(1999) and 37.4% (2000) a year. In addition, protests against the Chief Executive amounted to 1.3% of all the recorded protests. These events all took place in 2000 and onwards.

Collective protests against the repressive actions of government accounted for 8.3% of the recorded protests. During the period from 1996 to 2001, the proportion of such protests fluctuated between 3.5% and 10%. But from January to June 2002, the respective percentage soared to 21.5%.⁴²

Protests over prices and housing issues constituted 5.8% and 4.4%, respectively, of the recorded events. Both kinds of protests showed a fluctuating trend over the years. While the proportions of protests over prices varied from 1.8% (2002) to 8.8% (2001), the respective figures over housing issues were .5% (1999) and 8.6% (1996).

Gender discrimination was never an issue in this regard. In all, only five collective actions with this objective were recorded.

Table 26 shows the breakdown of the demands by their specific object. Nearly all of the demands were confined to local affairs. Four out of ten (40.1%) of the recorded demands requested certain actions — 22.9% asked for provision or improvement, 9.2% for compensation, 7.1% for intervention and .9% for prevention.

About one-third (33.3%) of the demands were directed specifically at public policies — 14% demanded legislative or policy modifications, 7% administrative or implementational modifications, 4.6% policy implementation or enforcement, 3.8% the abolition of policies, 1.6% regulation or legislation, 1.4% reservation of policies and .9% Basic Law modifications.

Only a minority of the events staged demanded the appointment, resignation, or dismissal of personnel (2.2%), participation and consultation (1.8%), disclosure of information (1.4%) and apologies (1.2%).

Mode of Actions

General Pattern

How conflicting goals are pursued is probably the most visible

Table 26 Major Object of Demand (%)

Demand for	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Provision, improvement	17.1	20.6	12.9	23.0	22.0	32.5	23.4	22.9
Legislative/policy modifications	19.3	12.9	13.9	9.2	10.5	12.3	29.0	14.0
Compensation	10.0	10.3	14.9	11.2	7.1	8.8	4.1	9.2
Intervention	5.0	8.4	7.9	3.3	7.6	7.4	9.0	7.1
Administrative/implementation modifications	4.3	4.5	10.4	5.9	8.9	4.8	9.0	7.0
Policy implementation, enforcement	2.9	11.0	1.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	3.4	4.6
Abolition of policies	.0	.0	.0	.0	8.1	7.1	1.4	3.8
Appointment, resignation, dismissal of personnel	2.9	.6	3.0	2.6	3.4	1.4	.7	2.2
Participation, consultation	2.1	.6	.0	2.0	2.1	3.1	1.4	1.8
Regulation, legislation	4.3	1.9	1.0	.0	1.3	1.7	1.4	1.6
Disclosure of information	1.4	.0	.0	.0	2.6	2.6	.7	1.4
Reservation of policies	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.6	3.7	1.4	1.4
Apologies	.0	.0	.0	.0	2.1	2.3	1.4	1.2
Basic Law modifications	.7	.0	1.0	.7	.8	.6	2.8	.9
Prevention	.0	.6	.0	3.9	.3	.3	2.8	.9
Others	30.0	28.4	33.7	33.6	17.0	6.6	8.3	20.0
(N)	(140)	(155)	(202)	(152)	(382)	(351)	(145)	(1527)

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

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” (Commission of Inquiry, 1966:129). In the 1980s, the *Report from the Standing Committee on Pressure Groups* already recognized the frequent occurrence of open protest actions, such as

petitions, demonstrations, sit-ins and processions as a “normal way of life” (Standing Committee on Pressure Groups, 1981).

In Hong Kong, in accordance with the Public Order Ordinance (Chapter 245, Sections 8 and 13A), organizers of public meetings and public processions are required to notify the Commissioner of Police at least seven days in advance.⁴³ Table 27 shows the total number of public meetings and processions held from 1996 to 2001. Government records show that the number of public meetings and processions in 1999 (2,326 events) was a jump of 130.8% from that of 1996 (1,008 events). During the period, no notices were refused by the police (Legislative Council, 2001:1150-51). 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 board categories: (1) persuasive action, (2) protest action and (3) violent action.⁴⁴ Table 28 summarizes how Hong Kong people pursued their goals through social conflict during the period from 1996 to 2002.

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 the conflict action is critical to mobilizing support from both 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 actions may in turn influence the public mind. The more frequently an action occurs, the more the public is willing to accept it. According to our survey conducted in 1993, Hong Kong people held distinct attitudes towards different modes of conflict actions. The degree of social acceptance of non-violent and self-confined actions, such as signature campaigns, press conferences, petitions and sit-ins, was relatively higher. 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% who thought otherwise. All of the actions of non-cooperation, such as industrial strikes, school strikes and driver strikes, were considered by an absolute majority of respondents to be radical. Violent action

Table 27 Number of Public Meetings and Processions

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Public meetings	—	639	1462	1419	1203	1271
Public processions	—	551	785	907	861	1076
Total	1008	1190	2247	2326	2064	2347

Note: The figures include all cases irrespective of whether or not prior notification is required to be given to the police under the law.

Sources: Legislative Council (2001:1151);
<http://www.info.gov.hk/police/aa-home/chinese/statistics/statsframe.htm>
 (accessed on 11 February 2003).

Table 28 Mode of Conflict Actions (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Persuasive actions								
Open letters	1.7	1.1	.3	1.9	10.4	11.0	8.9	6.4
Press conferences	10.1	9.3	5.2	3.3	6.1	6.5	4.1	6.4
Gatherings, meetings	4.0	3.8	5.5	4.4	5.1	6.7	3.2	5.0
Signature campaigns	4.5	3.0	3.2	4.7	6.2	5.9	3.5	4.8
Protest actions								
Demonstrations	38.4	43.1	38.8	49.9	39.0	43.4	52.5	42.8
Petitions, appeals	33.7	34.9	41.4	28.1	28.4	21.7	15.6	28.2
Boycotts	.0	.0	.3	.0	1.3	1.1	1.9	.8
Violent actions								
Personal attacks, violent confrontations	2.0	.0	.3	.6	.0	.0	.3	.4
Destruction of property, verbal attacks	.2	.3	.0	.6	.4	.2	.0	.3
Riots	.2	.0	.0	.0	.1	.0	.0	.1
Mixed actions	4.7	4.1	4.0	6.1	1.5	3.1	9.9	4.1
Others	.2	.0	.3	.6	.9	.1	.0	.4
Unknown	.2	.3	.9	.0	.8	.2	.0	.4
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

was particularly unacceptable (see Lau and Wan, 1997:61-64 for details of the survey).

Against this social context, we can observe in Table 28 that only .8% of all the recorded social conflicts adopted violent actions. Most of the violent actions (43.5%) occurred in 1996. The highest rate of violence was found in social conflict events relating to the Vietnamese boat people when they were forced to return to Vietnam under the Orderly Repatriation Programme.⁴⁵ This was followed by the collective disputes staged by right-of-abode seekers fighting for their rights as granted by the CFA's 29 January 1999 ruling.

Notwithstanding the higher degree of social acceptance of persuasive actions, claim-making parties were more inclined to use protest actions. During the period under study, only 22.6% of collective contentions made use of persuasive actions to pursue their goals, as compared with 71.8% that adopted protest actions. With respect to persuasive action, the most common modes were open letters (6.4%) and press conferences (6.4%), followed by meetings (5%) and signature campaigns (4.8%). With regard to protest action, demonstrations (42.8%) were more popular than petitions (28.2%). Very few social conflicts involved boycotts (.8%).

The occurrences of press conferences, meetings and signature campaigns fluctuated in a rather narrow range. No clear up or down movements could be observed. However, while petitions were the most popular mode of conflict action and demonstrations were relatively less frequent during the period from 1987 to 1995 (Lau and Wan, 1997:64-65), the trends were reversed in the present study. The proportion of demonstrations rose from 38.4% in 1996 to 52.5% in 2002, whereas petitions declined from 33.7% to 15.6% over the same period.

As shown in Table 29, the six most popular issues in contention differ in the mode of conflict actions that was adopted to pursue them ($\chi^2 = 41.8$, $df = 15$, $p < .001$). Comparatively speaking, it was more likely for labour-related issues (27%) to make use of persuasive actions, followed by political issues (24.7%) and housing issues (21.6%). Issues concerning civil rights were more inclined to resort to protest actions, violent actions and a mixture of actions. For example,

Table 29 Major Issue in Contention by Mode of Actions (%)

	Persuasive actions	Protest actions	Violent actions	Mixed actions	(N)
Civil rights and liberties	14.8	77.5	.8	6.9	(533)
Labour and employment	27.0	70.7	.0	2.4	(423)
Housing	21.6	74.0	.5	3.9	(408)
Culture and religion	18.8	75.8	.2	5.2	(405)
Economics	18.1	78.3	.0	3.6	(249)
Politics and government	24.7	71.9	.4	3.0	(235)

while 77.5% of civil rights-related conflicts pursued their goals by means of protest actions, .8% by violent actions and 6.9% by a mixture of actions; the corresponding percentages for labour-related conflicts were 70.7, 0 and 2.4.

Mode of Demonstrations

The degree of social acceptance of demonstrations is lower than that of petitions. However, more aggressive conflict action generally enjoys a higher social exposure and, thus, puts more pressure on the adversarial party to respond. Our survey findings in 1993 revealed that various modes of demonstration were accepted by the public in the following descending order: sit-ins, processions, hunger strikes, school strikes, industrial strikes, driver strikes, road blockages and violence. The proportion of respondents who regarded such actions as radical ranged widely from 29.1% to 81.9% (see Lau and Wan, 1997:64 for details of the survey).

During the period under study, over four out of ten (42.8%) of the recorded social conflicts used demonstrations to articulate their grievances or demands. Table 30 shows the distribution of modes of demonstrations recorded over the period from 1996 to 2002. Mass processions and ceremonies accounted for 43.2% of all the recorded demonstrations. Their proportions ranged from 34.2% (2001) to

Table 30 Mode of Demonstrations (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Mass processions, ceremonies	49.0	40.8	36.3	49.2	50.6	34.2	44.2	43.2
Small-scale demonstrations	27.7	36.9	33.3	21.0	15.3	17.2	20.6	22.4
Sit-ins	11.6	6.4	11.9	9.9	7.8	5.7	4.8	7.9
Strikes, industrial actions, walkouts	1.9	1.3	3.7	2.2	2.6	3.2	4.8	2.8
Road blockages	.6	.6	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.4	.6	1.2
Driver strikes	1.3	.0	1.5	1.1	.6	1.4	1.2	1.0
Hunger strikes	1.3	1.9	1.5	2.8	1.0	2.6	.6	1.7
School strikes	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Threats to stage demonstrations	.6	.6	.0	.6	8.4	8.3	6.1	4.7
Others	5.8	11.5	10.4	11.6	12.0	25.9	17.0	15.0
(N)	(155)	(157)	(135)	(181)	(308)	(348)	(165)	(1449)

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

50.6% (2000). Small-scale demonstrations, i.e., less than 20 persons, were the second most extensively used action, making up 22.4% of the total. The highest proportion was found in 1997 (36.9%) and the lowest in 2000 (15.3%). Sit-ins came third with 7.9%. Acts of economic non-cooperation, such as strikes, industrial actions and walkouts, were not common. They constituted only 2.8% of all the recorded demonstrations. Other social actions of non-cooperation, such as road blockages and driver strikes, were also infrequent. Such actions comprised 2.2% of our accounts of demonstrations — 1.2% for the former and 1% for the latter. The self-inflicting actions of hunger strike happened occasionally and made up another 1.7%. In recent years, there has been an increase in events where open threats to take the above actions have been made. The proportion of such actions rose from less than 1% in the late 1990s to around 8% in the early 2000s.

Target of Petitions

During 1996 and 2002, petitions were used in nearly three out of ten (28.2%) of all the recorded conflicts to articulate grievances or demands. As shown in Table 31, the government was unmistakably the most popular target of petitions. In Hong Kong, lawmaking power is highly centralized and rests with the Chief Executive (formerly the Governor) and with senior government bureaucrats. On the whole, 15.2% of all petitions were directed at the Chief Executive, and another 30.3% at various government departments or officials. Petitions to the Chief Executive shot up in 1997 to 43.3%.⁴⁶ Yet, with the exception of 1998 (22.2%), the frequency remained at a relatively stable level of about 10%. The trend of petitions to government departments or officials was significantly different. Except for a decline in 1997 (11%), this category of petition rose steadily and, since 2000, has become the most common kind of petition.

The main function of the Executive Council (hereafter, Exco), the highest body in the HKSAR government, is to advise the Chief Executive on all important matters of policy. It also has the power to make subsidiary legislation under a number of ordinances. However, all of the members of Exco are appointed to office by the Chief Executive, its proceedings are confidential and the council is collectively responsible for the decisions made by the Chief Executive in Council; therefore, it has never been a popular target of petitions.

Hong Kong has a three-tiered system of representative government — Legco at the central level; the former Urban Council (hereafter, Urbco) and Regional Council (hereafter, Regco) at the regional level;⁴⁷ and DCs at the district level. The major functions of Legco are to enact legislation, control public funds and formulate questions to the government on matters of public interest. Direct elections to Legco were introduced in 1991 and 40% of its current members were returned through popular vote. On the whole, petitions to Legco accounted for 12.2% of the total record.

The former Urbco and Regco were statutory councils responsible for providing municipal services. The major function of the DCs is to provide a forum for public consultation. Although around three-quarters of Urbco, Regco and DC members were returned through

Table 31 Target of Petitions (%)

Petition to	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Chief Executive/Governor ¹	11.0	43.3	22.2	7.8	6.3	8.6	12.2	15.2
Government departments, officials ²	23.5	11.0	21.5	26.5	39.3	43.7	44.9	30.3
Exco	1.5	6.3	3.5	2.9	4.5	2.9	.0	3.5
Legco, OMELCO ³	9.6	12.6	10.4	7.8	16.1	9.2	26.5	12.2
Urbco	.0	1.6	.7	1.0	—	—	—	.4
Regco	.0	.0	.0	.0	—	—	—	.0
DCs	.0	.0	.7	1.0	5.4	4.0	4.1	2.4
Chinese government-related authorities								
NCNA ⁴	20.6	6.3	4.9	2.9	.4	.0	.0	4.9
Liaison Office, Foreign Affairs Office	.0	.0	.0	.0	4.5	2.9	2.0	1.7
PC	4.4	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.6
Authorities outside HK	19.1	11.8	15.3	35.3	5.4	5.2	.0	12.6
Public institutions ⁵	1.5	1.6	6.9	2.0	4.5	8.6	8.2	4.7
Private institutions	2.9	2.4	8.3	7.8	8.9	12.6	.0	7.2
Others	5.9	3.1	5.6	4.9	4.9	2.3	2.0	4.3
(N)	(136)	(127)	(144)	(102)	(224)	(174)	(49)	(956)

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

1. Includes 3 petitions to the Chief Executive and government departments; 3 to the Chief Executive and Legco; 2 to the Chief Executive and private institutions; 1 to the Chief Executive and Exco; and 1 to the Chief Executive and authorities outside Hong Kong.
2. Includes 3 petitions to government departments and private institutions; 1 to a government department and the PC; and 1 to a government department and a public institution.
3. Includes 2 petitions to Legco and government departments.
4. Includes 6 petitions to the NCNA and authorities outside Hong Kong; and 1 to the NCNA and the PC.
5. Includes 1 petition to a public institution and a private institution.

direct election, these bodies had rarely been regarded as a target of petitions (.4%, 0% and 2.4%, respectively). Yet, petitions to the DCs seem to have increased since 2000.

Petitions to public institutions as well as those to private institutions saw a rising trend during the period under study. They made up 4.7% and 7.2%, respectively, of all the recorded petitions. While the proportions of petitions to public institutions grew from 1.5% in 1996 to 8.6% in 2001, the respective figures for private institutions were 2.9% and 12.6%.

Less than one-tenth of all petitions were targeted at Chinese government-related authorities in the territory — 4.9% at the NCNA, 1.7% at the Liaison Office and the Foreign Affairs Office, and .6% at the PC. Before the transfer of sovereignty, the NCNA was a popular arena for political struggle. For example, in 1996, 20.6% of all the recorded petitions were targeted at it. Since 1997 onwards, the role of the NCNA in receiving complaints has greatly diminished and, in recent years, it has been partially replaced by the Liaison Office and the Foreign Affairs Office.

Petitions targeted at authorities outside Hong Kong constituted 12.6% of all the petitions.⁴⁸ They rose suddenly in 1999 (35.3%) and then dropped back to around 5% a year.

Parties in Contention

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

Claim-making Party

In general, claims are expectations and demands to gain status, power or resources 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 an antagonistic party in our sample of social conflicts was rather rare, about one-tenth of the 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 features of these parties, we identified up to five parties per event. According to our account, individual conflict events with more than five allies constituted only 2.8% of the total conflicts. The problem of undercounting 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 the Claim-making Party

The crucial role of resources in the emergence and development of social conflict is well-documented. The ability of aggrieved people to mobilize their resources has a direct impact on their conflict goal 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 4,704 claim-making parties were identified from 3,385 conflict events. Table 32 outlines the profile of these parties and their changes between 1996 and 2002. Of all the recorded claim-making parties, 16.9% lacked sufficient information for us to identify their organizational nature. This was less the case in 2000 and 2001.

On the whole, claim-making parties that did not exist as organized entities before the conflict made up 14.8% of our account. Emergent conflict groups, such as single-issue standing groups, spontaneously formed groups and joint committees of groups, constituted only 8.7% of those recorded.

About six out of ten (59.4%) claim-making parties were established groups before the conflict. A majority of them consisted of political parties, political groups and pressure groups (30.7%). The second largest was comprised of labour unions and professional groups (14.6%), followed by community groups (3.4%), student groups (3.2%) and religious groups (2.5%). Groups of a trade, ethnic

Table 32 Prior Organization of Claim-making Parties (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No prior organization	14.3	7.1	10.7	8.6	20.8	17.6	13.8	14.8
Emergent conflict groups								
Joint committees of groups	10.8	8.6	6.0	4.5	2.6	3.7	4.0	5.1
Single-issue standing groups, spontaneously formed groups	5.3	2.5	4.1	5.1	3.2	2.9	3.3	3.6
Continuously organized groups								
Political parties, pressure groups	30.8	40.4	28.5	25.7	29.1	34.7	21.2	30.7
Labour unions, professional groups	11.4	9.6	16.9	15.1	15.0	14.0	22.1	14.6
Community groups	2.5	1.0	.0	3.7	6.1	4.5	1.3	3.4
Student groups	3.0	2.9	1.4	3.3	5.3	2.4	2.9	3.2
Religious groups	.6	.4	.8	3.7	1.4	6.1	1.3	2.5
Trade groups	1.1	.2	3.3	1.2	2.4	2.6	1.3	1.9
Primary sector groups	1.0	.0	.0	.4	.7	.3	.0	.4
Ethnic groups	1.0	.0	.4	.6	.2	.1	.0	.3
Welfare groups	.4	.0	.0	.0	.0	.3	.0	.1
Other sectoral groups ¹	.2	1.8	1.0	2.4	1.7	.5	1.3	1.2
Private institutions	.2	.0	1.2	1.2	.6	1.2	.4	.8
Others ²	.2	.2	.0	.4	.7	.3	.2	.3
Unknown	17.3	25.3	25.4	24.1	10.1	8.9	26.6	16.9
(N)	(526)	(510)	(484)	(510)	(1080)	(1146)	(448)	(4704)

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

1. For example, women's groups, youth groups.

2. For example, sports groups, recreational groups.

or welfare nature were not especially active in organizing collective actions.

The participation of political groups was slightly different from that of other organizations. While the activities of the latter maintained a relatively stable trend over the years, those of the former reached its peak in 1997, followed by a downward trend.

Social Background of Participants

In collective actions, people are probably the most fundamental resource to be mobilized. People with a similar socio-demographic background are more likely to have similar social situations and, hence, similar grievances against others. Such a social cleavage constitutes the underlying condition for the sense of solidarity and collective identity that is indispensable to any collective struggle. Some social cleavages are based on established divisions, such as union versus boss and people versus 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 lifestyle. These quasi-groups have socially recognized distinctions but, generally, have no established organizations to represent them in conflict. Without a collective identity, discontented persons may just voice their grievances or advance their interests individually, and not expend their resources in participating in collective 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 their degree of organization are conducive to group solidarity and, thus, facilitate the mobilization of resources. This section focuses on the socio-occupational and organizational backgrounds of the initiators and the participants.

Initiators

Socio-occupational background. Table 33 gives the distribution of the major socio-occupational backgrounds of the individual initiators. Social conflicts initiated by named associations were excluded from the analysis in this section. It is very clear that three

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

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Agricultural/animal husbandry workers, fishermen	3.8	.0	5.7	2.3	4.1	3.3	.0	3.2
Production workers, transport equipment operators	20.0	7.1	17.0	9.2	14.5	20.2	22.0	17.0
Sales/service/clerical workers	4.8	9.5	11.3	4.6	5.0	9.2	9.2	7.2
Social workers	5.7	7.1	5.7	3.4	2.4	.3	.0	2.2
Educational: teachers	5.7	7.1	3.8	2.3	6.2	7.1	6.4	6.1
Educational: students	17.1	16.7	9.4	16.1	15.4	7.7	11.9	12.6
Businessmen, shopkeepers, proprietors	1.9	7.1	13.2	4.6	7.4	7.7	8.3	7.1
Members of representative institutions	19.0	19.0	9.4	9.2	16.3	13.6	11.9	14.5
Government officials	2.9	7.1	1.9	8.0	9.8	5.6	7.3	6.9
Police, military	.0	2.4	.0	.0	.9	.3	.0	.5
Journalists	2.9	2.4	3.8	1.1	.3	1.8	8.3	2.1
Medical/health workers	1.9	2.4	5.7	3.4	1.8	.9	1.8	1.9
Legal professionals	3.8	2.4	.0	2.3	.6	1.2	.0	1.2
Intellectuals, artists, writers, musicians	1.0	.0	1.9	1.1	.0	.3	.0	.4
Other professionals, technical and related workers	.0	2.4	1.9	1.1	1.8	2.1	3.7	1.9
Religious workers	2.9	4.8	.0	9.2	3.0	8.3	6.4	5.4
Foreign citizens, e.g., Vietnamese	3.8	2.4	3.8	2.3	.9	.0	.0	1.1
Ethnic minorities	1.0	.0	.0	1.1	.0	.3	.0	.3
Right-of-abode seekers	.0	.0	1.9	13.8	5.3	3.9	.9	4.2
Mixed categories	1.9	.0	3.8	4.6	3.6	4.7	1.8	3.5
Others ¹	.0	.0	.0	.0	.9	1.5	.0	.7
(N)	(105)	(42)	(53)	(87)	(338)	(337)	(109)	(1071)

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

Conflict events with no initiator (17 events), initiated by named associations (1,708 events) or named associations and individuals (53 events) were excluded.

1. For example, administrative and managerial workers, economically inactive persons.

groups of persons were most active in initiating collective contentions. Production workers and transport equipment operators stood out as the most active category. This group of manual workers constituted 17% of our account of initiators. Following them were members of the representative institutions, namely, Legco, Urbco and DCs. They made up 14.5% of all the identifiable individual initiators. Students came third and took up another 12.6% of the total record.

The involvement of sales, service and clerical workers; businessmen; government officials; and teachers was quite common. Each accounted for 6.1% to 7.2% of the total number of individual initiators.

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

Over the years under study, only three initiators who clearly belonged to ethnic minorities were reported.

Organizational background. Table 34 presents the major organizational background of both individual initiators and group initiators. Of all, only a minuscule percentage (.5%) of events were identified as having no initiator and 11% were initiated by unorganized individuals. Events with insufficient information amounted to 12.6% of the total record.

As expected, political parties, political groups and pressure groups were the most active in organizing collective actions. They backed 40.9% of all the recorded social conflicts. Labour unions and professional groups also played a role. About 6.7% of our accounts of contentious events were initiated by such groups or by persons belonging to these groups. Resident groups and community groups were the third largest category and were involved in 5.4% of the conflict events reported. Other organizations, such as consumer groups, welfare groups, teacher groups, primary sector groups and international groups, were of lesser importance in initiating collective action. It should be noted that about one-tenth (9.2%) of all

Table 34 Major Organizational Background of Initiators (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Primary sector groups	.5	.0	.3	.6	1.3	.4	.0	.5
Trade groups ¹	1.2	.0	1.7	1.1	1.3	3.0	1.9	1.6
Labour unions, professional groups	6.4	2.7	7.8	7.2	5.7	8.0	9.6	6.7
Civil servant groups	.7	.8	.0	2.2	3.2	1.4	1.9	1.7
Student groups	3.5	1.9	1.1	3.6	6.5	3.0	3.5	3.7
Teacher groups	.5	.5	.0	.3	1.4	.4	.3	.6
Educational groups	.7	1.1	1.1	.6	.5	1.9	.3	1.0
Falun Gong	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.1	2.9	1.3	1.1
Other religious groups	.2	.5	.6	5.2	.5	1.6	1.0	1.3
Welfare groups	.2	.0	.0	.0	.1	.1	.0	.1
Resident/community groups	7.4	5.2	6.6	3.3	9.2	2.2	2.5	5.4
Consumer groups	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Political parties, pressure groups	42.3	56.3	41.7	37.7	35.1	42.1	35.0	40.9
International groups	.7	.3	.6	1.1	.1	.4	.0	.4
Private institutions	.2	.0	.3	.6	.3	1.0	.6	.5
Mixed groups	9.7	12.1	12.6	8.8	6.1	10.0	8.0	9.2
Others ²	2.5	2.2	1.4	1.7	1.5	.2	.3	1.3
No initiator	2.2	.0	.9	1.1	.1	.0	.0	.5
Unorganized	5.9	4.4	2.0	4.7	17.3	16.6	12.1	11.0
Unknown	14.9	11.5	21.3	20.4	8.7	4.9	21.7	12.6
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

1. Includes 1 event initiated by an employer group.

2. For example, ethnic groups, sports groups.

the recorded conflicts were initiated by persons or groups of mixed organizational backgrounds.

Collective actions organized by political parties, political groups and pressure groups reached their peak in 1997 (56.3%) and then fluctuated at between 35% and 42.1% of all conflicts. Conflicts initiated by persons with no distinct organizational background were infrequent in the late 1990s. But this kind of event rose significantly in the early 2000s, and constituted around one-sixth of the total record.

Participants

Tables 35 to 37 summarize the background of the participants with respect to their occupation, industry and organizational affiliation. According to the available news accounts, participants in many collective actions were organizations. They made up 32.6% of all the recorded events. The highest proportion was found in 1997 (57.7%) and the lowest in 2000 (14.2%).

The social composition of individual participants was quite heterogeneous. A majority of events involved participants from different occupations, industries or organizations. The respective proportions were 24.5%, 67.8% and 19.9%.

Some categories of people were more active in participating in collective contentions. With regard to occupation, production workers, students, and sales, service and clerical workers tended to participate more often in social actions. They made up 6.1%, 3.4% and 3.2%, respectively, of our account of social conflict events (see Table 35).

With respect to industry, people from the transport, storage and communications industry and the service sector were the most active categories. About 6% of the recorded social conflict events were joined by transport, storage and communications workers and 5.4% by workers from the services sector (see Table 36). Social conflicts with workers from other single industries as primary participants were comparatively infrequent.

Table 37 shows the major organizational background of the social conflict participants. Apparently, people from political parties, political groups and pressure groups were especially active in

Table 35 Major Socio-occupational Background of Participants (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No distinct category	25.7	19.2	26.7	22.0	27.2	22.7	27.1	24.5
Agricultural/animal husbandry workers, fishermen	1.0	.0	1.7	.8	1.8	1.4	.0	1.1
Production workers, transport equipment operators	7.4	1.9	5.2	2.5	6.2	8.0	8.9	6.1
Sales/service/clerical workers	1.2	1.9	4.9	2.5	3.3	3.7	4.1	3.2
Social workers	1.7	.8	.6	1.1	.8	.1	.0	.7
Educational: students	4.7	2.2	1.4	4.7	4.4	2.4	3.5	3.4
Educational: teachers	1.2	.3	.9	.3	2.0	1.4	1.9	1.3
Educational: teachers and students	.2	.3	.0	.8	.3	.5	.0	.3
Businessmen, shopkeepers, proprietors	.5	.8	3.4	1.1	3.4	3.6	3.2	2.6
Members of representative institutions	2.5	.5	.3	.0	.9	.6	1.0	.8
Government officials	.7	.8	.3	2.2	3.4	2.1	3.2	2.0
Police, military	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Journalists	.7	.3	.9	.3	.1	.5	2.9	.6
Medical/health workers	.7	.3	1.1	1.1	.8	.4	.0	.6
Legal professionals	.7	.3	.0	1.1	.0	.1	.0	.3
Intellectuals, artists, writers, musicians	.2	.0	.3	.3	.0	.0	.0	.1
Other professionals, technical and related workers	.0	.3	.3	.6	.8	.9	1.3	.6
Religious workers	.5	.5	.0	1.1	1.0	2.7	2.2	1.3
Foreign citizens, e.g., Vietnamese	1.2	.3	.6	.6	.3	.0	.0	.4
Ethnic minorities	.2	.0	.0	.3	.0	.1	.0	.1
Right-of-abode seekers	.7	1.6	.3	6.9	2.8	2.6	.3	2.3
Mixed categories	.5	.0	.9	.8	1.9	3.4	2.2	1.7
Organizations and individuals	39.9	57.7	42.5	44.6	14.2	27.9	27.7	32.6
No participant	2.7	1.6	.9	.8	14.4	9.5	2.5	6.5
Unknown	4.7	8.0	6.9	3.6	10.1	5.4	8.0	6.9
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Table 36 Major Industrial Group of Participants (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No distinct category	75.1	84.4	69.0	74.7	55.9	64.5	64.1	67.8
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	1.0	.0	1.7	.8	2.2	1.5	.0	1.2
Manufacturing	.3	.0	1.4	.6	.7	.6	.3	.6
Construction	3.3	1.4	2.0	.0	2.2	1.8	2.9	2.0
Wholesale and retail trade, restaurant, hotel	.3	2.0	5.5	.0	2.7	5.2	5.9	3.2
Transport, storage, communications	5.1	1.1	7.0	5.8	5.0	7.9	9.5	6.0
Finance, insurance, real estate, business services	.5	.0	1.2	1.9	.3	.6	.7	.7
Services	6.1	2.5	5.8	6.1	6.5	4.7	5.6	5.4
Students	4.6	2.2	1.7	5.0	5.3	2.8	3.6	3.7
Government officials	.8	.8	.3	2.8	4.0	2.6	2.6	2.2
Members of representative institutions	.0	.0	.0	.0	.9	.0	.3	.2
Mixed categories	.5	.6	.9	.6	2.1	2.2	1.3	1.4
Others	.0	.6	.6	.0	.7	.3	.3	.4
Unknown	2.5	4.5	2.9	1.7	11.4	5.5	2.9	5.3
(N)	(393)	(358)	(345)	(360)	(676)	(726)	(306)	(3164)

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

social conflict events. Of all our accounts of collective contentions, 24.6% were joined by people from political parties, political groups and pressure groups. This kind of event peaked in 1997 (42%) and subsequently declined to around 20% a year. Resident and community groups came second and made up 9.6% of the total. Such collective actions were more prevalent in the late 1990s (e.g., 17.1% in 1996) and have become less frequent in recent years (e.g., 2.1% in 2001).⁴⁹ Labour unions and professional groups came third and constituted 6.2% of all the recorded conflicts.

Table 37 Major Organizational Background of Participants (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No distinct background	19.3	17.3	23.0	18.2	14.2	23.7	26.4	19.9
Primary sector groups	.5	.0	.3	.0	1.4	.5	.0	.5
Labour unions, professional groups	6.2	2.7	8.3	6.9	4.2	7.1	9.6	6.2
Civil servant groups	.5	.8	.0	2.2	2.2	.9	2.2	1.3
Student groups	4.2	1.9	1.1	4.4	3.9	1.9	3.2	3.0
Teacher groups	.2	.3	.0	.3	.6	.0	.3	.3
Educational groups	.5	.8	1.1	.3	.1	.9	.3	.6
Falun Gong	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.0	2.7	1.3	1.0
Other religious groups	.2	.3	.0	3.9	.3	1.0	.6	.8
Welfare groups	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.1	.0	.0
Resident/community groups	17.1	10.7	13.2	12.9	12.2	2.1	3.8	9.6
Consumer groups	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0
Political parties, pressure groups	27.7	42.0	27.3	27.5	16.2	22.7	20.1	24.6
International groups	.0	.3	.6	1.1	.0	.2	.0	.3
Private institutions	.0	.0	.6	.6	.1	.7	.6	.4
Mixed groups	8.9	9.6	9.8	8.0	4.3	7.9	8.6	7.6
Others	2.7	1.6	1.4	1.7	.3	.2	.6	1.0
Unorganized	4.2	2.5	2.0	3.0	16.1	12.7	10.2	9.0
No participant	2.7	1.6	.9	.8	14.4	9.5	2.5	6.5
Unknown	5.0	7.1	10.3	8.3	8.6	5.1	9.6	7.4
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Involvement of Members of Representative Institutions

Members of representative institutions, i.e., Legco, the former Urbco, the former Regco and the DCs, 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

Table 38 Conflict Events Involving Members of Representative Institutions (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Legislative Council	23.0	14.3	12.4	10.2	13.3	11.3	10.5	13.4
Urban Council	2.0	4.7	1.7	.3	—	—	—	.9
Regional Council	.5	1.4	.0	.3	—	—	—	.2
District Councils	4.0	9.3	2.6	3.9	8.9	9.0	4.8	6.8

only takes into account their involvement as initiators or participants of the claim-making party. Regardless of other possible contributions, the mere association with the action 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 38 gives the proportions of social conflict events that took place 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 were DC members.

As found in our previous study, since the introduction of direct elections to Legco in 1991, the number of social conflict events reported to have received the support of Legco members had increased significantly (Lau and Wan, 1997:91-92). As a matter of fact, most of the elected Legco members from the democratic camp came from grassroots organizations and have to maintain their political capital by playing the role of protest action leader. Yet, the present data set suggests that, since the regime transfer and the subsequent change in Legco's composition, conflict events involving Legco members have dropped to a level of 10%.

Target Party

For a social conflict to occur, certain real organizations or people outside the claim-making party must be held responsible for the

perceived grievance. We name this group the 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 for each conflict event. For the 3,385 events, a total of 3,615 target parties were identified.

As shown in Table 39, most social conflicts involved the government, either as a party to conflict with or as an object of claims. The government *per se* and its administrative departments were the target group in 53.7% of the reports. Incidents of collective action with the local government as a target rose steadily during the period under study. While such events made up 35.5% of all the recorded conflicts in 1996, the respective proportion (65.4%) was almost double in 2002. It was found that the government councils, i.e., Exco, Legco, OMELCO, Urbco, Regco and DCs, had not been major conflict targets. They together constituted only 4.5% of the total. Most such conflicts happened in 1997.

The Chinese government, together with its NCNA, Foreign Affairs Office and the PC, was another focus of conflicting aims. From 1996 to 2002, nearly one-tenth (8.9%) of all collective contentions were directed towards the Chinese government.

It was followed by private institutions (8.4%), overseas polities and organizations (8%), employers and manufacturers (6.1%) and public institutions (6%).

Third Party

A third party in a social conflict is perceived as neutral arbitrator. It mediates between the contending parties. Its intercession can prevent conflicts from escalating and can hasten the resolution of conflicts. In the present study, we recorded up to two third parties in each event. Neither the police in regulating or pacifying a social conflict nor the mass media in publicizing the event is classified as a third party.

The involvement of a third party in social conflicts was very infrequent. Altogether, a total of 69 third parties were identified from all the recorded social conflict events, and their distribution is shown in Table 40.

Table 39 Target Party of Social Conflict Events (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Hong Kong government	35.5	49.9	49.7	49.0	61.0	56.9	65.4	53.7
Government councils ¹	5.6	12.2	7.5	6.7	2.3	.9	2.4	4.5
Other public institutions	4.0	3.6	5.6	4.6	5.0	9.1	8.0	6.0
Private institutions	4.2	4.1	8.4	8.5	11.0	9.7	8.9	8.4
Employers, manufacturers	4.9	2.3	7.5	5.2	4.7	9.4	6.4	6.1
Public figures	2.7	2.3	.3	.3	1.3	.2	1.2	1.1
Political parties, pressure groups	.2	1.0	.3	.0	1.3	.7	.6	.7
Courts	.2	1.0	1.7	1.3	.2	.2	.9	.6
Schools	.0	.0	.0	.0	1.5	1.1	.3	.6
General public	.0	.0	.0	.0	.7	.5	.6	.3
Chinese government and its related authorities								
Chinese government	6.0	7.4	5.9	7.0	5.4	4.3	3.4	5.4
NCNA	12.7	3.6	3.1	1.8	.0	.1	.0	2.5
PWC, PC	4.2	.5	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	.6
Foreign Affairs Office	.0	1.0	1.4	.5	.2	.1	.0	.4
Organizations in China	.0	.0	.0	.0	.2	.2	.0	.1
Overseas polities, organizations	19.2	10.7	8.7	13.7	4.0	4.4	1.5	8.0
Others	.4	.5	.0	1.5	1.1	2.1	.3	1.1
(N)	(448)	(393)	(358)	(388)	(854)	(847)	(327)	(3615)

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

1. Includes Exco, Legco, OMELCO, Urbco, Regco and DCs.

In the 1980s, it was more common for people to file their complaints to government councils than to other institutions. In recent years, government councils' relative importance in reconciling public grievances has declined considerably. It is obvious that the government was also regarded by the public as the primary arbitrator of social conflicts. It made up an absolute majority of all the recorded third parties. The respective proportions of the government *per se*

and the government councils as a third party of collective contentions were 62.3% and 14.5%.

Employers and manufacturers came second in mediating social conflicts, making up 15.9% of the total record. All other institutions, within or outside Hong Kong, were of negligible importance.

Outcome

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

The distributive aspect of conflict outcomes was 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.

Table 40 Third Party to Social Conflict Events (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Hong Kong government	55.6	57.1	40.0	66.7	50.0	76.9	100.0	62.3
Government councils ¹	11.1	14.3	20.0	11.1	33.3	7.7	.0	14.5
Employers, manufacturers	22.2	14.3	40.0	11.1	16.7	7.7	.0	15.9
Public figures	11.1	14.3	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	4.3
Political parties, pressure groups	.0	.0	.0	11.1	.0	.0	.0	1.4
Overseas polities, organizations	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	7.7	.0	1.4
(N)	(18)	(7)	(5)	(9)	(12)	(13)	(5)	(69)

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

1. Includes Exco, Legco, OMELCO, Urbco, Regco and DCs.

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 concessions or trade-offs.
3. Successful: the claim-making party aims to change the status quo and succeeds in gaining most or all of that which was pursued from the target party.

In addition to the distributive aspect, we also try to record the political outcome of social conflicts by coding 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 targeting the Chinese government or that involved it as the third party, as well as those directed at overseas polities.

The results shown in Tables 41 to 43 indicate clearly that the attempt to gather information on social conflict outcomes from newspaper reports is practically futile. The proportions of events with insufficient information range from 65.3% (governmental response) to 99.7% (political consequence).⁵⁰ Nonetheless, based on the data that was available, it could be observed that the proportion of unsuccessful collective contentions was larger than that of the successful ones (30.6% versus 2.8%).⁵¹

Table 41 Immediate Outcome (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Unsuccessful	50.2	44.5	33.6	36.9	18.1	21.2	34.1	30.6
Partial realization of objective, demand partially fulfilled	2.7	6.9	4.3	2.5	2.3	2.2	1.6	3.0
Successful	3.2	2.5	2.3	3.0	3.3	3.2	1.0	2.8
Unknown, indeterminate	43.8	46.2	59.8	57.6	76.3	73.2	63.4	63.5
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Table 42 Governmental Response (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
No response	12.6	8.5	7.5	24.8	21.4	28.6	16.9	19.2
Departmental administrative responses, interventions	18.8	8.5	9.5	12.9	7.1	16.0	18.8	12.7
Public responses from central government	2.0	3.3	2.0	1.4	.3	.2	.3	1.1
Debates, questions in representative institutions	1.2	1.6	.9	.3	.4	1.6	1.0	1.0
Formal inquiries	.0	.0	.3	.0	.0	.1	.3	.1
Mixed responses	1.5	.3	.0	.6	.1	.1	.3	.4
Others	.5	.5	.0	.3	.1	.2	.3	.3
Unknown, not applicable	63.4	77.2	79.9	59.8	70.6	53.1	62.1	65.3
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Table 43 Political Consequence (%)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Personnel changes	.0	.0	.0	.0	.4	.2	.0	.1
Institutional changes	.0	.0	.0	.0	.1	.0	.0	.0
Legislative, policy changes	.0	.3	.0	.3	.0	.0	.0	.1
Others	.0	.0	.0	.0	.1	.0	.0	.0
Unknown, not applicable	100.0	99.7	100.0	99.7	99.4	99.8	100.0	99.7
(N)	(404)	(364)	(348)	(363)	(790)	(802)	(314)	(3385)

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

Concluding Remarks

“Intergroup as well as intragroup conflicts are perennial features of social life” (Coser, 1968:233). 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, methods and outcomes of social conflicts are conditioned by the socio-economic and political situations of society as well as by the relative capacity and orientation of the contending parties. The occurrence of socially accepted conflicts in turn empowers the civil society by providing an opportunity for collective experience and learning and by strengthening people's sense of collective identity and efficacy. Consequently, socially accepted conflict alters 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 participate in, social conflicts. They tend to deem collective actions as an effective means to articulate their interests,⁵² and are also quite ready to take part in these non-institutionalized actions.⁵³ The rising number of demonstrations even suggested a new label for Hong Kong: city of protest (*The Washington Post*, 28 June 2000, Section A, p. A21). Nonetheless, according to a survey conducted by Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi in 2001, 93% of the respondents had never participated in any demonstrations, public processions or sit-ins, and 95.4% had never participated in any kind of collective action other than demonstrations, public processions and sit-ins. It seems that more and more conflicts are being taken to the streets, but that the majority of Hong Kong people are still playing the role of spectator.

The present study has attempted to inventory the everyday social conflicts that occurred during the period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 2002 as reported by the press, and to examine the ways in which people try to protect or forward their collective interests. A total of 3,385 social conflict events were recorded.

Most of these recorded social conflicts were of short duration, initiated by named associations instead of individual persons, engaged neither allies nor antagonistic parties, and had a limited number of participants. The majority of conflict actions were peaceful and

bounded by mutually agreed-upon principles. Outbreaks of violence were extremely rare and governmental repression self-controlled. Only one of the recorded events resulted in fatalities and a negligible proportion of people were injured or arrested.

Most social conflicts involved the government, either as an object of claim, a party to conflict against, or an arbitrator of conflicts. Citizenship became an accepted basis for making claims on the government. Government buildings were the most popular venues for the public voicing of claims. The Chinese government, which had “participated” in social conflicts mainly as the absent object of people’s grievances and demands in the late 1980s and early 1990s, seemed to have resumed its insignificant position in local collective contentions.

The past several years has seen an expanding zone of conflicts, involving more and more social groups of various natures and individuals from different walks of life. Even physicians,⁵⁴ legal professionals,⁵⁵ homeowners and pro-government political parties have staged their own collective actions. Yet, manual workers, members of the representative institutions and students were still the most active people in organizing collective action. The social base of collective contention has become broader and more heterogeneous. Participants in many conflict events came from different occupations, industries or organizations. In general, production workers, students, sales, service and clerical workers and people with a political party affiliation tended to be involved more often in collective action.

“Civil rights and liberties,” “labour and employment” and “housing” were the three most frequent issues leading to conflict. Following these were conflicts pertaining to “culture and religion,” “economics” and “politics and government.” The majority of the conflict events aimed to protest against some specific objects or to demand something or some changes. Claim-making parties were more inclined to use protest actions instead of persuasive actions to pursue their goals. Comparatively speaking, it was more likely for labour-related issues to make use of persuasive actions, followed by political issues and housing issues. Issues concerning civil rights

were more inclined to resort to protest actions, violent actions and a mixture of actions.

As Kriesberg states (1998:6), “conflict, if its management is properly institutionalized, is an effective means for discovering truth, for attaining justice, and for contributing to the long-run benefit of a society or an organization.” The pivotal questions are how to prevent or de-escalate destructive conflicts and how to wage or manage conflicts constructively.

Notes

1. For example, only 22% of Britons in 1975 reported signing a petition, while the respective proportion rose to 75% in 1990 (Dalton, 1996:76).
2. On industrial conflicts and strikes, see England and Rear (1975, 1981) and Chiu (1987). On labour movements, see Turner (1980), Jao et al. (1988) and Leung and Chiu (1991). On urban movements, see Lui (1984, 1989, 1993), Lui and Kung (1985) and So and Kwitko (1992). On rural conflicts, see Freedman (1966), Chau and Lau (1982), Strauch (1984) and Chiu and Hung (1997). On student movements, see Fung (1973) and Leung (1992, 2000). On social movements, see Lui and Chiu (1996) and Chiu and Lui (2000). On democratic movements, see Cheng (1989), Cheung (1991), Lee (1991) and Sing (1993). On collective violence, see Cooper (1970) and Leung (1990, 1994). On environmental protection, see Bar-on and Ng (1994) and Lai (2000).
3. For example, Coser (1968) defines social conflict as “a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflict parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities.” Kriesberg (1998:2) states that “a social conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives.” Bartos and Wehr (2002:13) define social conflict as a situation in which “actors use

conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility.”

4. However, protest advertisements reported in news reports were included.
5. See Mack and Snyder (1957), Tilly (1978:247-52) and Gurr (1980:2). Operationalizations of different aspects of a social conflict event are given in the respective sections.
6. For the whole period of our study. The major journalistic appeal of *Ming Pao Daily News* is that it is informative and articulate. It provides relatively comprehensive coverage of local news. For credibility, it has been ranked first by the general public.
7. For the period from 1 January 1996 to 31 December 1999. This set of newspaper clippings is 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 the *South China Morning Post*. (The total coverage of this collection is from the 1950s to August 2000.)
8. For the period from 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1999. (The total coverage of this collection is from February 1980 to June 1999.)
9. For the period from 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2002. WiseNews provides full-text articles from the following dailies, namely, the *Apple Daily*, *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, *Hong Kong Daily News*, *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, *Hong Kong Economic Times*, *The Standard*, *Metropolis Daily*, *Ming Pao Daily News*, *Oriental Daily News*, *Sing Pao*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *SCMP.com*, *The Sun*, *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po*.
Keywords include: 工業行動, 去信, 申訴, 示威, 抗議, 杯葛, 致函, 記者會, 閉門會議, 發佈會, 發表聲明, 絕水, 絕食, 街頭劇, 集會, 遊行, 暴動, 暴亂, 罷工, 罷市, 罷課, 罷駛, 請願, 論壇, 靜坐, 簽名運動.
10. In the West, conflict events reported in the mass media generally represent only a small proportion of those recorded in police data

(McCarthy et al., 1996). For example, Oliver and Myers (1999) examine public events in police records for 1994 in Madison, USA. They find that local newspapers covered 32% of all events, favouring those that were large, involved conflicts, especially those that had been sponsored by business groups and occurred in central locations. The more liberal papers also favoured rallies and events sponsored by national social movement organizations or recreational groups. Swank (2000) studies the coverage by news organizations on demonstrations against the Persian Gulf War in San Diego. It is shown that every newspaper missed most of the protests, and that the coverage rate varied by newspaper, with none of the newspapers displaying consistent coverage rates throughout time.

11. If two or more simultaneous conflict actions occur in the same place(s) aiming at the same issues 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.
12. The protesters had been staying in Chater Garden since 10 January. On 25 April, more than 300 police and immigration officers cordoned off the area after protesters trapped the Secretary for Security, Regina Ip, in her car for an hour outside the Legco building the day before.
13. For example, on 18 September 1996, more than 600 schools, with about 800,000 teachers and students, held a minute's silence before classes to protest against Japan's claim to the Diaoyutai islands. The protest was also in memory of the 18 September incident of 1931 that heralded Japan's invasion of China.
On 4 June 1997, 55,000 people took part in a candlelight vigil in Victoria Park in memory of the June 4th event of 1989.
On 18 April 1999, about 9,000 government officials from 30 unions marched to the Chief Executive's Office demanding that the proposed privatization of the Housing Department be shelved.
On 1 April 2002, about 7,000 Pacific Century CyberWorks staff started a work-to-rule campaign (i.e., during which they refused to

work overtime or take extra shifts) to protest against the sacking of 858 employees.

14. For example, on 8 January 2002, 27 organizations, including the Asian Human Rights Commission, Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, Amnesty International's Hong Kong Section and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, issued a joint statement urging the government not to seek a reinterpretation of law from Beijing.

On 1 May 1999, about 300 members of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and over 40 labour unions marched from Victoria Park to the Central Government Office calling for more job protection. The protesters urged the government to introduce legislation on a minimum wage and on collective bargaining rights.

15. An example of the presence of independents: On 7 December 2000, in the ceremony of awarding an honorary law doctorate to Lee Kuan Yew at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, (1) members of the April 5th Action Group shouted slogans through loudhailers as Lee delivered his speech; (2) representatives from Amnesty International, the Ecumenical Grassroots Development Centre and the Chinese University Students Union waved banners and distributed leaflets outside the university; and (3) a Sha Tin DC member, Chow Ka-kong, sitting in the audience, raised his fist in a Black Power-style salute as the award was made to Lee.

An example of the presence of antagonists: On 17 March 2001, while the *Wen Wei Po* and the Chinese History, Culture and Education Foundation for Youths were hosting an exhibition entitled "Upholding Civilization, Opposing Evil Cults," four Falun Gong practitioners tried to unfurl a picture showing fellow members being beaten by mainland officials at the venue and distributed fliers outside the venue.

16. On 12 May 2000, the bus drivers drove their buses at a snail's pace, slowing traffic to a standstill for three hours from 5:30pm.

On 15 January 1999, 120 protesters from six villages lay down on a railway track in Yuen Long between 3:30pm and 4:45pm to demonstrate against inadequate compensation for land resumption.

Trains on four Light Rail Transit routes were halted and about 10,000 passengers were affected.

17. That is to say, repressive force is always applied in proportion to the violation of proscription. People who commit unauthorized acts suffer punitive sanctions, the severity of which hinges upon the seriousness of the act.
18. On 6 March 1996 at the High Island Detention Centre, about 40 Vietnamese tried to storm a gate with home-made weapons. At least ten tear gas grenades were fired into the crowd to prevent more inmates from breaking out. During the riot, a Correctional Services Department officer was taken hostage. The boat people were demanding the abolition of the forced repatriation scheme and threatened to take the life of the hostage if their demand was not met. The hostage was freed after 11 hours of intense negotiations between his captors and a Correctional Services Department team. On 7 March, more than 1,000 officers in anti-riot gear rounded up 210 boat people for repatriation. During the operation, more than 10 Vietnamese climbed onto the roof, chanted and poured water on the officers.

On 10 May 1996 at the Whitehead Detention Centre, more than 1,000 inmates participated in a riot, throwing home-made spears at officers; over 1,800 tear gas grenades were fired by a 2,000-strong army of riot police and prison guards; 14 prison guards were taken hostage for four hours; 22 Correctional Services Department officers, 16 policemen, 5 Fire Services Department officers and 30 boat people were injured; 26 offices and huts and 53 vehicles were set on fire; one canteen and many officers were robbed; and at least 200 boat people escaped from the centre.

19. On 16 November 1999, a day-long riot began after the Housing Department tried to evict the village's last nine families and eight shops to make way for an anti-flood project. About 25 villagers armed with metal bars, machetes and petrol bombs; put up flaming barricades made of furniture; and attacked officers to protest against the clearing. A man held a cigarette lighter to a full gas canister and threatened to blow himself up. Firefighters sprayed water and anti-riot police fired tear gas and pepper spray at the protesters. Fourteen

people, eight of them police, were injured. Fourteen people were arrested, including two DC election candidates, Wong Sing-chi and Sham Wing-kan.

20. On 3 December 1999, the Court of Final Appeal (hereafter, CFA) reversed its ruling of 29 January 1999 on mainlanders' right of abode in Hong Kong, upheld the absolute power of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (hereafter, NPCSC) to interpret the Basic Law, validated the NPCSC's 26 June interpretation of the relevant part of the Basic Law, and upheld the legality of removal orders issued against the 17 abode claimants (i.e., mainlanders who had overstayed their visit in the territory and who claimed right of abode in the lawsuit) in February 1999. This follow-up ruling not only affected the 17 claimants and the other 4,393 mainlanders who had applied for leave for judicial review, but also the future of hundreds of thousands of mainlanders with similar claims. About 1,000 mainlanders and their supporters, angered by the court's ruling that took away the abode rights it had granted on 29 January, clashed with the police. When the protesters started hurling stones, ladders and potted plants at the police, the latter used pepper spray to repel the rioters. The fighting lasted nearly five hours and left 18 people injured, including 6 police officers.
21. These are the four events described in Notes 18 to 20. Another event was an arson attack on the Immigration Tower on 2 August 2000. A group of mainland right-of-abode seekers, demanding that the department issue them Hong Kong identity cards, sprinkled bottles of flammable liquid around the entrance to the lobby and set it ablaze. Twenty-three immigration officers and 27 protesters were taken to hospital. The fire killed one senior officer, Leung Kam-kwong, and one protester.
22. See Notes 18 to 20 for examples.
23. See Note 21 for the event that resulted in fatalities.
24. See Note 21 for an event in which the initiators were wounded. An example in which the initiators were arrested: On 7 May 2001, seven activists, demanding greater democracy for mainland China and Hong Kong, chained themselves to a flagpole outside

the Convention and Exhibition Centre and disrupted preparations for the Fortune Global Forum. Two hours later, the police cut the chains and arrested the protesters.

25. For example, on 28 April 1998, 30 protesters who were investors of the failed CA Pacific Securities were arrested for obstructing police officers in the execution of their duties as the protesters staged a sit-in protest in the middle of the tram tracks, blocked the tramway and disrupted the busy lunch hour traffic on Des Voeux Road in Central.
26. For example, on 29 October 1997, five Legco building security guards were injured in a protest against the Provisional Legco to pass a motion allowing the government to repeal or amend three labour laws (i.e., legislation permitting collective bargaining, protecting union members against discrimination by employers and giving union members the right to join foreign organizations with the prior consent of the Chief Executive-in-Council) enacted by the previous administration. Four protesters were arrested and one protester fell down the stairs while struggling with security guards.
27. For example, in 1989, 84.8% of the collective actions over civil rights involved mainland China (Lau and Wan, 1997:37).
28. The reinterpretation states that mainlanders have abode rights only if their parents had residence status at the time of their birth, and could only resettle in Hong Kong once they received a Certificate of Entitlement issued by the Immigration Department through the mainland authorities. On 3 December, the CFA upheld the absolute power of the NPCSC to interpret the Basic Law, as well as the legality of removal orders issued against the abode claimants.
29. The majority of events related to the most alarming incident, dubbed "Pollgate," in the local history of public opinion. On 7 July 2000, the front page of the *South China Morning Post* reported a claim by Robert Chung, Director of the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong, that he had received political pressure from the Chief Executive, through a "special channel," to discontinue his polls on Tung's popularity and the government's credibility, presumably because Tung was upset at his declining

ratings. Chung later named a Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the university as the “special channel.” The incident triggered a heated debate on academic freedom and government interference, caused the appointment of an independent inquiry chaired by a member of the CFA and a televised testimony, and finally, on 6 September 2000, the resignation of the Vice-Chancellor and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

30. For example, on 4 September 2001, about 30 representatives of the Social Democratic Forum and the Federation of the Public Housing Estates Resident and Shopowner Organisations petitioned outside the Central Government Offices and handed petition letters to Executive Council (hereafter, Exco) members to protest against the proposed suspension of the Home Ownership Scheme.
31. For example, on 25 June 2000, the Liberal Party led a march in Central district, in which more than 2,000 people participated, to protest against the property slump and to highlight the problem of negative equity suffered by flat owners.

On the same day, 300 protesters marched along Nathan Road in Yaumatei to protest against the soon-to-be established Urban Renewal Authority, claiming its land resumption power was too great and its compensation scheme unfair.

32. See Note 19 for the most violent event of its kind.
Another notable example occurred in Rennie’s Mill, home to about 6,000 pro-Kuomintang settlers since the 1960s. On 16 April 1996, Rennie’s Mill residents claimed that the Housing Department was in contempt of court for pressing ahead with plans to clear the area — 22 home-owners were suing the government for breaking a promise made in 1961 that the residents of the area could have permanent residence or, if the area was cleared, that they would be allocated land for rehousing; and the High Court granted them leave to proceed with a lawsuit challenging the clearance. During the conflict, residents hurled abuse and wielded sticks at workers, minor scuffles broke out, and the clearing operation was forced to stop.
33. For example, on 4 March 2002, representatives of the Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centres and ten other women’s groups staged a demonstration in front of the Central Government Offices,

calling for a gender-responsive budget analysis, demanding resources and support from the administration, and promoting the economic empowerment of women. In a display of protest, the protesters prepared a bowl of soup with bitter melons, fish skeletons, empty chestnuts and beancurd for the government. They said that bitter melons represented the taste that government policies left in the mouths of lower-class working women and homemakers; fish skeletons the dire straits they faced trying to feed their families; empty chestnuts the empty words of encouragement from officials; and beancurd the vulnerability of women.

34. For example, on 13 February 2002, five members of the Social Democratic Forum demanded that the Financial Secretary introduce a tax rebate in his budget speech on 6 March. The protesters said cash coupons worth HK\$1,000 should be distributed to every adult citizen to encourage spending and help needy families.
35. For example, on 10 July 2001, about 110 small-scale fishermen sailed their boats to Kau Sai Chau to protest against continued intrusions of large trawlers into their traditional fishing grounds off Sai Kung. The protesters, claiming the bigger boats were affecting their livelihood by catching too many fish and damaging their nets, urged the government to stop the big boats from fishing in the area.
36. For example, on 7 February 2000, protesters, led by members of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, marched to the Central Government Offices and urged the government to introduce reforms to solve the problem of widening income inequality.
37. The majority of these events were concerned with the election of the Chief Executive.
38. For example, on 19 June 2002, as Legco passed a motion supporting the new accountability system for principal officials, four legislators, namely Lau Chin-shek, Lee Cheuk-yan, Leung Yiu-chung and Michael Mak, condemned the process and walked out. Lee said that the government was “high-handedly and forcibly” implementing the new system.
39. The majority of these events involved Hong Kong-mainland affairs

and Hong Kong-United Kingdom affairs and took place in 1989. While many of the former concerned the draft Basic Law which came out in 1988, most of the latter aimed at pressing for the right of abode in the United Kingdom for the 3.25 million British Dependent Territory citizens in Hong Kong (Lau and Wan, 1997:43-44).

40. An example of an event related to international relations: On 5 April 2002, about 30 Bangladeshis, angered by a story entitled "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror" reporting rising Islamic fundamentalism in their home country, protested against the *Far Eastern Economic Review* outside its head office in Wan Chai. They burned copies of the magazine and handed a protest letter containing 400 signatures to the magazine's deputy editor.
41. On 11 July 1989, Jiang Zemin stated that, "according to the principle of 'one country, two systems,' China practises socialism and Hong Kong practises capitalism. The well water [Hong Kong] should not interfere with the river water [China]." Since then, conflicts directed at mainland China have dropped significantly.
42. For example, on 25 April 2002, a reporter and a cameraman were handcuffed and two photographers were pushed to the ground by police, as the latter cleared right-of-abode seekers from Chater Garden. The Hong Kong Journalists' Association and the Hong Kong Federation of Journalists claimed that the police had abused their power, condemned the police for handcuffing journalists and demanded further explanations.
43. The notification system for public processions came into operation on 22 December 1995. However, the Commissioner of Police may accept a shorter notice period if the Commissioner is satisfied that earlier notice could not have been given. Besides, Section 7 of the Public Order Ordinance on the Regulation of Public Meetings shall not apply to a meeting of not more than 50 persons; and Section 13 shall not apply to any public procession consisting of not more than 30 persons.
44. See Lofland (1985) for his elaboration on the distinction among persuasive and polite action, irreverent protest action and destructive violent action.

45. See Note 18 for details of the riots that occurred in the High Island and Whitehead Detention Centres.
46. For example, on 5 July 1997, four members of the United Front Against the Provisional Legislature, whose Home Return Permits were confiscated by Beijing in 1996, petitioned the Chief Executive's Office and urged Tung Chee-hwa to ensure that their right to return to the mainland was protected.
On 6 July 1997, members of the April 5th Action Group marched to the Chief Executive's Office, urging Tung Chee-hwa and Exco not to repeal the five labour laws passed in the last sitting of Legco.
47. Both councils were dissolved at the end of 1999.
48. For example, on 8 May 1999, more than 100 protesters, led by members of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, marched from Chater Garden to the American and British diplomatic missions, protesting against the NATO missile attack on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and demanding that NATO apologize and compensate the Chinese government for the attack.
49. A number of such events were staged by Richland Gardens residents in 1996 to protest against the building of an HIV/AIDS clinic in the neighbourhood. A Richland Gardens Concern Group was formed and hundreds of residents participated in a series of mass sit-ins at the entrance to the construction site to halt construction work.
50. Includes "not applicable" cases.
51. An example of the successful events: On 11 May 1999, over 20 members of the Motor Transport Workers General Union and the Harbour Transportation Workers General Union petitioned Exco, urging the government to ask the NPCSC to reinterpret the relevant articles of the Basic Law so as to curb the possible influx of 1.67 million mainlanders. The NPCSC reinterpreted the ruling on 26 June 1999. For further details, see Note 20.
52. 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% agreed, while only 17% thought otherwise. See Hsiao and Wan (1996:294).

53. In the 1993 social indicators survey, we asked the respondents whether they would be afraid of getting into trouble if they participated in protest actions against the government. Most of the respondents (55.8%) said that they would not be afraid, as compared with 23.1% who were afraid. See Fung (1995:308).
54. The biggest protest of its kind in a decade occurred on 25 June 2000. More than 1,000 doctors staged an hour-long silent protest at the headquarters of the Hospital Authority to protest against a revamp of the medical profession's grading structure, which they believed would waste resources, undermine morale, further strain manpower shortages, and lead to a deterioration in the quality of services provided to patients.
55. For example, on 30 June 1999, over 600 lawyers, dressed in black, joined a 25-minute silent march from the High Court to protest against the reinterpretation of the Basic Law in Beijing and to show support for an independent judiciary.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CFA	Court of Final Appeal
DC	District Council
Exco	Executive Council
Foreign Affairs Office	Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HA	Housing Authority
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HS	Housing Society
Legco	Legislative Council
Liaison Office	Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
NCNA	New China News Agency (Hong Kong Branch)
NPCSC	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress
OMELCO	Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils
PC	Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
PLA	People's Liberation Army Forces Hong Kong (Hong Kong Garrison)
PWC	Preliminary Working Committee, Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
Regco	Regional Council
Urbcoc	Urban Council

Social Conflicts in Hong Kong

1996-2002

Abstract

This study has attempted to inventory the everyday social conflicts that occurred during the period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 2002 as reported by the press. A total of 3,385 social conflict events were recorded.

Most of the recorded social conflicts were of short duration; initiated by named associations; engaged neither allies nor antagonistic parties; had a limited number of participants; and involved the government, either as an object of claim, a party to conflict against, or an arbitrator of conflicts.

The majority of conflict actions were peaceful and bounded by mutually agreed-upon principles. Outbreaks of violence were extremely rare and governmental repression self-controlled.

The past several years has seen an expanding zone of conflicts and the social base of collective contention has become broader and more heterogeneous. Yet, production workers, people with a political party affiliation and students tended to be involved more often in collective action.

“Civil rights and liberties,” “labour and employment,” “housing,” “culture and religion,” “economics” and “politics and government” were the six most frequent issues leading to conflict. The majority of the conflict events aimed to protest against some specific objects or to demand something or some changes. It was more likely for labour-related, political and housing issues to make use of persuasive actions, while issues concerning civil rights were more inclined to resort to protest actions.

香港的社會衝突

1996-2002

尹寶珊 王家英

(中文摘要)

本研究旨在記錄香港在1996年1月1日至2002年6月30日間發生的社會衝突事件，有系統地以量化的方法來探討其特色和變化。

根據報章的報道，此期間有3,385起社會衝突事件，多數都為時短暫、由具有名稱的團體發動，並無盟友或敵對群體，參與者不多和採用非暴力的手段。在此等衝突事件中，香港政府的角色是作為訴求對象、衝突的一方或衝突的仲裁者。政府對集體抗爭行動的施壓也非常克制。

參與集體抗爭行動的社會群體愈來愈多樣化，但仍以產業工人、政黨成員和學生較為積極。

引發社會衝突的原因極多，當中以涉及公民權利、就業、住屋、文化與宗教、經濟，以及政治等議題的集體行動最為普遍。絕大部分衝突事件都有具體目標，或是向特定的對象提出抗議，或是要求採取相應的行動。相對而言，關乎就業、政治和住屋等問題的社會衝突，比較傾向採用說服性手段，而針對公民權利的事件則較多訴諸對抗性途徑。

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Director: Yeung Yue-man, PhD(*Chic.*),
Research Professor

Associate Director: Sung Yun-wing, PhD(*Minn.*),
Professor, Department of Economics