Gender and Political Participation in Hong Kong

Formal Participation and Community Participation

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Formal Participation

In recent decades, equality in gender representation has emerged worldwide as a major feature of "good governance." It is stressed that democratic governance should include the equal participation and representation of women in politics and decision-making. Accordingly, the global community has been trying to increase the political participation of women through various means. On 22 December 2003, the United States-sponsored resolution on women and political participation was adopted by the full General Assembly of the United Nations. The United States, joined by 110 co-sponsors, succeeded in passing the much-needed resolution, giving a resounding United Nations endorsement to women across the globe becoming active participants in the political life of their countries. The resolution reaffirms basic principles on the participation of women in the political process, such as the right of women to vote in all elections and to run for and hold office. Governments are urged to ensure equal access to education and to eliminate laws and regulations that discriminate against women. The resolution also urges political parties to seek qualified female candidates and provide them with the training and support that would help to expand the political, management, and leadership skills of women (U. S. Department of State, 2003).

As of 30 April 2005, on average, global female representation in both Houses of all parliaments constitutes only 15.9%. The Nordic countries score 39.9%, the highest among all countries and regions. The overall extent of female representation in parliaments in Asia remains lower than in the Nordic countries and most European

countries. Within Asia, mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong fare better than many other Asian countries such as Singapore, South Korea, India, Thailand, and Japan (Table 1).

In 1995, the Hong Kong government participated in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing at which

Table 1   Representation of women in parliaments, regional averages as of 30 April 2005 (%)

	Single House or Lower House	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	39.9	39.9
Americas	18.8	18.9
Europe: OSCE member countries (including Nordic countries)	18.9	18.5
Europe: OSCE member countries (excluding Nordic countries)	16.9	16.9
Asia	15.2	15.1
Mainland China	20.2	—
Taiwan[1]	20.9	—
Hong Kong[2]	18.3	—
Singapore	16.0	—
Philippines	15.3	—
South Korea	13.0	—
Indonesia	11.3	—
Thailand	10.6	—
India	8.3	—
Japan	7.1	—
Sub-Saharan Africa	15.0	14.9
Pacific	11.2	13.3
Arab States	8.8	8.1

Notes: 1. Situation as of 2004. See Table 6 of Sun (2005).
              2. Information based on Table 2.

Source: Information mainly drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world300405.htm, retrieved on 24 July 2005).

the Beijing Platform for Action was endorsed. The Platform for Action sets out strategic objectives to empower women through promoting their advancement and removing all the obstacles to their active participation in all spheres of public and private life. Governments, the international community, and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, were called upon to take measures to ensure that women have equal access to and fully participate in power structures and decision-making at all levels; and to increase the capacity of women to participate in decision-making and leadership.[1] On 14 October 1996, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was extended to Hong Kong. Article 7 of the CEDAW states that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country" (http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm#part2).

This paper focuses on three different aspects of gender and political participation in Hong Kong. The first section analyses gender participation in the formal governing institutions and in the administration of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government. The second section focuses on gender participation in the electoral processes. The participation of women as voters and candidates in the electoral processes will be scrutinized. We seek to understand whether a gender gap exists in political participation, and to explore whether the recent partial democratization process has affected the representation of women in the District Council (DC) and in the Legislative Council (LegCo). The last section explores gender and community participation in Hong Kong.

Gender and Participation in the Governing Institutions and Administration

Legally speaking, not only do women in Hong Kong have the same rights as men to vote and to stand for elections, the HKSAR government has also adopted a policy of equal opportunity in recruiting and promoting civil servants. Nevertheless, the government has failed to implement affirmative action or special measures to enable and realize the right of women to participate in all areas of public life and particularly at high levels of the political decision-making process. This section provides an overview of the relative status of both sexes in the central and district levels of governing institutions, in the civil service, in the judiciary system, and in government advisory and statutory bodies.

Representation of Women in Governing Institutions

In 2005, women were under-represented at both the central and local levels of governing institutions. As shown in Table 2, women now occupy 13.3%-18.3% of all positions in formal governing institutions in Hong Kong. The government of the HKSAR is led by the Chief Executive and the Executive Council. The Executive Council, the highest governing institution, assists the Chief Executive in policy-making and all its members are nominated by the Chief Executive. In August 2006, women held only 4 of the 30 seats (13.3%) in the Executive Council.[2] As for the legislature, all of its members are elected, with half of the seats directly elected through geographical constituencies, and the other half elected by functional constituencies. In the LegCo election held in September 2004, 26 out of 159 candidates were women. Of the 26 female LegCo candidates, half had participated in elections in geographical constituencies, and half had competed for the seats elected by functional constituencies. At present, women hold only 11 of the 60 seats (18.3%) in LegCo. Of the 11 female legislators, 6 were elected by geographical constituencies; the remaining 5 were elected by functional constituencies. In the DC election held in 2003, of the 502 elected and appointed members, only 90 (17.9%) were women.

Table 2   Percentage of female councillors at the central and local
levels of governing institutions, August 2006

		Total number	Number of women	Percentage of women
Central level	Executive Council	30	4	13.3%
	LegCo	60	11	18.3%
Local level	DCs[1]	502[2]	90	17.9%

Notes: 1. Information from by-elections has not been included.
2. 27 ex-official members are not included.

Representation of Women in the Civil Service

In 2005 women held about a third of civil service posts. In general, women remain less well represented in the top tiers of the administrative and judicial systems. As shown in Table 3, in March 2005, in the top level of government administration, only 2 of 19 principal officials and officials at the rank of director of bureau were women. Of the 39 officials of directorate grade 6 rank and above (and equivalent), only 9 were women. It is only in the post of permanent secretary that female civil servants had a relatively high degree of representation (41.2%).

In recent decades, the growth in the representation of women in the civil service has been better than that in other governing institutions. The representation of women in directorate-level positions has risen from 4.9% in 1981 to 24.6% in 2003 (Burns 2004:44-45, 202-03).[3] The gender composition of the Administrative Officer grade has changed dramatically over the past two decades. In 1983, women made up less than 18% of the grade as a whole. By 2003, women were holding nearly 52% of all positions in the administrative service. The trend towards gender equality in the administrative service is remarkable. Burns (2004:110-11, 202-03) has argued that this may have been caused by an increase since 1996 in the participation of female students in programmes funded by the University Grants Committee. Consequently, many more qualified female graduates than male graduates have been competing for government jobs.

Table 3   Percentage of women in government administration, March 2005

Posts	Total number	Number of women	Percentage of women
Principal officials and officials at the rank of director of bureau	19	2	10.5%
Permanent secretaries	17	7	41.2%
Officials of directorate grade 6 rank and above (and equivalent)	39	9	23.1%

Source: Civil and Miscellaneous Lists (http://www.info.gov.hk/cml/, retrieved on 24 July 2005).

Female university graduates have also been performing at a better than average level in civil service recruitment examinations that "place a premium on verbal skills and communication ability, which may favour business, arts, and social science graduates. Women now dominate these subjects in Hong Kong's universities."

Representation of Women in the Judiciary System

In the judiciary system, Table 4 shows that all four of the judges of the Court of Final Appeal are men. However, the percentage of female judges in the High Court increased from 0% in 1991 to 18.2% in March 2005, while in the same period in the District Courts the percentage of female judges increased from 14.7% to 32.3%. As in the administrative service, the increase in the representation of women in the High Court and District Courts can be explained by a rise in the number of female undergraduate students admitted to law schools. Since the early 1980s, females have out-numbered males in the law programme of the University of Hong Kong (Choi, 2003:47). Consequently, women have been able to enter the judiciary, improving the balance of its gender composition in the last decade or so.

Representation of Women in Government Advisory and Statutory Bodies

Although political power is highly centralized within the executive-

Table 4   Percentage of women in the judiciary, 1991 and 2005

Posts	Total number		Number of women		Percentage of women	
	1991	2005	1991	2005	1991	2005
Judges of the Supreme Court (prior to 1997)	10	—	0	—	0%	—
Judges of the Court of Final Appeal (after 1997)	—	4	—	0	—	0%
Judges of the High Court	22	33	0	6	0%	18.2%
Judges of the District Courts	34	31	5	10	14.7%	32.3%

Sources: Civil and Miscellaneous Lists (http://www.info.gov.hk/cml/, retrieved
on 24 July 2005); data of 1991 adapted from Lui (1995:141).

led government, a network of government advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs) has been established. The government seeks to obtain, through consultation with interest groups and individuals in the community, the best possible advice on which to base decisions or to perform statutory functions. The existing 501 ASBs are divided among those that are advisory in nature and those that are executive bodies performing public functions on a wide range of matters affecting the lives of residents in Hong Kong. The proportion of women in ASBs has remained relatively low. This issue has captured the attention of the Women's Commission, who discussed the matter with the Home Affairs Bureau in March 2001. The Women's Commission (2004:42-43) suggested that positive measures be taken to enhance the participation of women. Currently, the HKSAR government is adopting a modest gender benchmark, with each sex having a minimum representation in such bodies of 25%. With this gender benchmark, we observe that the representation of women in ASBs gradually improved. As shown in Table 5, as at 1 December 2004, the number of female non-official members appointed to ASBs was 1,971, while 6,667 of the members were men. The representation of women in ASBs has demonstrated an increase of only 3.5% since 2001 (from 19.3% in 2001 to 22.8% at the end of 2004.)

Of the 501 ASBs, fewer than half have reached the benchmark

Table 5   Percentage of women in government ASBs, 2001-2004

	Total number	Number of women	Percentage of women
2001	5,939	1,147	19.3%
2002	5,981	1,208	20.2%
2003	5,319	1,190	22.4%
2004	8,638	1,971	22.8%

Sources: Census and Statistics Department (2002:81, 2004:101); Home Affairs
              Bureau (2005).

while more than half (57.7%) have failed to do so.[4] To ensure that the
voices of women are heard at different stages of policy formulation
and decision-making, the government will have to constantly review
and raise the gender benchmark to be in line with international
standards.

Summing up so far, we can say that the expansion of the higher
education sector since the 1990s has increased the proportion of
women entering universities and other institutions of higher education.
This, in turn, has led to the participation of more women in both the
higher ranks of the civil service and the lower ranks of the judiciary.
However, women are still under-represented, especially in the top
tiers of the administrative, governing, and judicial institutions. Nor is
the situation any better in the ASBs. Here, despite the government's
recent adoption of a modest gender benchmark, the representation
of women has only marginally improved and is still well below the
benchmark. In the following section, we will examine women's
participation in the electoral processes and see if there has been any
significant improvement over the past two decades.

Gender Participation in the Electoral Process

As there are different levels of participation, rather than making the
general claim that women participate less than men, a distinction
should be made according to specific forms of political participation.
This section examines gender participation in the electoral process

and seeks to understand any gender difference exists. We will first examine the participation of women as electors who cast their votes in central and district elections; and second, look at women who participated as candidates and ran for public office.

Gender and Voter Participation

At the first level of political participation, the conventional understanding that "women don't care about politics" can no longer be substantiated in Hong Kong. Table 6 shows that, in recent years, there has not been a significant gender gap in registered voters and voter turnout rates. In the DC election held in 2003, there were over 2.97 million registered electors, and close to half of them (48.8%) were women.[5] In the 2004 LegCo elections, there were over 3.2 million registered electors, and again almost half of them (48.9%) were women. Similarly, in the two recent LegCo elections, there was no significant gender gap in terms of voter turnout rates. In fact, in 1998, slightly more women than men turned out to vote. In the two recent DC elections held in 1999 and 2003, the gender gap (though a minor one) in voter turnout was also reversed, with women voting more often than men.

Gender and Participation as Candidates

If there is no significant gender gap in voter turnout rates, is there any gender difference in participation as candidates in elections? In this section, we will examine gender participation as candidates at both the district level and the central level. We will identify whether women have made any progress in this form of participation over the past two decades.

   To elect women to public office you need to have two things: women who are willing and able to stand as candidates, and voters who are willing to vote for them. In Hong Kong, voters in general do not have strong bias against female candidates or politicians. Two recent surveys on the popularity of legislators have shown that the three most popular legislators, namely Rita Fan, Audrey Eu, and Selina Chow, are all female.[6] Indeed, the success rate of female

Table 6   Registered electors and voter turnout in DC and LegCo elections, 1998-2004

	DC election			LegCo election		
	1999	2003	1998	2000	2004	
Registered electors (gender percentage)						
Females	1,359,507 (48.0%)	1,450,339 (48.8%)	1,334,792 (47.8%)	1,477,334 (48.4%)	1,568,594 (48.9%)	
Males	1,473,017 (52.0%)	1,523,273 (51.2%)	1,460,579 (52.3%)	1,578,044 (51.7%)	1,638,633 (51.1%)	
Total	2,832,524	2,973,612	2,795,371	3,055,378	3,207,227	
Voter turnout (turnout rate)						
Females	396,859 (29.2%)	522,998 (36.1%)	716,639 (53.7%)	643,766 (43.6%)	868,387 (55.4%)	
Males	419,644 (28.5%)	543,375 (35.7%)	773,066 (52.9%)	687,314 (43.6%)	916,019 (55.9%)	
Total	816,503	1,066,373	1,489,705	1,331,080	1,784,406 (55.6%)	

Sources: Census and Statistics Department (2002:83, 2006:101).

candidates in elections is, in general, slightly higher than that of their male counterparts. Unfortunately, the proportion of women candidates remains low in both the DC and LegCo elections. As there has been little work focusing on female candidates, this section also analyses their profiles and seeks to understand their party identities.

DC Elections

The 18 DCs came into being on 1 January 2000 by virtue of the District Councils Ordinance. The DCs have a wider role than the former District Boards (DBs). The Councils advise the HKSAR government on district affairs and promote recreational and cultural activities, and environmental improvement within their respective districts. In 1994, as part of the political reforms of the last Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, all appointed DB seats were abolished. Following Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, the first Chief Executive of the new HKSAR government, Tung Chee-hwa, reverted to the pre-1994 practice, that is, he reinstated 102 appointed seats in the DCs. The DCs comprise both elected members and appointed members.

As shown in Table 7, the percentage of female candidates in DC elections has increased gradually, from 5.0% in 1982 to 17.4% in 2003. In the first DBs elections held in 1982, there were only 20 women among the 403 candidates (Tong, 2003:198). The number of female candidates rose to 146 in 2003. In 1982, only 10.1% of District Councillors were female; by 2003, the representation of women in the DC had increased to 17.9%.

Over the last two decades, there has been a huge gap between the two sexes in terms of participation as candidates in the DC elections. Table 8 shows that 82.6% of the candidates who ran for office at the district level were men, while women accounted for only 17.4%. Table 8 also shows that while 102 district councillors were appointed in 2003, women constituted only 18.6% of the appointed seats. The continuation of the appointment system has always been a matter of debate, as many democrats have argued that it violates the principles of democracy and political equality. The principles governing the appointment system have also not been disclosed. The government, on the other hand, has insisted that democracy

Table 7   Percentage of female candidates in district-level elections, 1982-2003

				Year of DB/DC election			
	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1999	2003
Candidates							
Number of women	20 (5.0%)	30 (6.0%)	52 (10.6%)	48 (10.3%)	97 (12.8%)	129 (16.2%)	146 (17.4%)
Total number	403	501	493	467	757	798	837
Councillors							
Number of women	24 (10.1%)	23 (8.0%)	29 (9.1%)	43 (9.8%)	36 (10.4%)	72 (14.6%)	90 (17.9%)
Total number	237	289	320	441	346	492	502

Note: By-election figures are not included.

Sources: Data partially adapted from Tong (2003:198); Westwood, Mehrain and Cheung (1995:148); and Census and Statistics
Department (2006:100).

Table 8   Gender analysis of the candidates participating in the
2003 DC elections

	Males	Females	Total
Number of candidates	691 (82.6%)	146 (17.4%)	837
Number of elected councillors	264 (81.0%)	62 (19.0%)	326
Number of uncontested councillors	65 (87.8%)	9 (12.2%)	74
Number of appointed councillors	83 (81.4%)	19 (18.6%)	102
Total number of district councillors	412 (82.1%)	90 (17.9%)	502

Sources: Based upon information posted on the Electoral Affairs Commission's
website (http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/distco/2003dc_elect.htm) and
Census and Statistics Department (2006:100).

has more than one definition, and that no political system worth the
name of democracy should ignore the minority voices that may be
marginalized and ignored in a simple majority voting system. Seen
in this light, the point of maintaining the appointment system is to
balance the different voices and interests within the wider society.
Be that as it may, from a gender perspective there is no obvious sign
that the government has used the appointment system as a way of
promoting gender parity in the DCs.

Since political parties have played an important role in recruiting
female candidates over the previous DC elections, it is worth taking
a closer look at their performance. We have chosen the two largest
political parties, the Democratic Party (DP) and the Democratic
Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) for
an in-depth analysis. Table 9 shows that in the 2003 DC elections,
women constituted only 18.5% of DP candidates. Of the 93 DP
district councillors, only 18 were female (19.4%). A similar gender
gap was apparent for the DAB, where more of the candidates and
councillors were male than female. In the DC elections held in 2003,
women constituted only 15.6% of the DAB's candidates. Of the 61
DAB district councillors, only 11 were female (18.0%).

Table 9 shows that the under-representation of women in
party membership and in the recruitment and nomination of female

Table 9   Political party and gender participation in the 2003 DC elections

	DP	DAB
Total number of candidates		
Overall	124	205
Males	101 (81.5%)	173 (84.4%)
Females	23 (18.5%)	32 (15.6%)
Number of elected candidates		
Overall	93[1]	61
Males	75 (80.6%)	50 (82.0%)
Females	18 (19.4%)	11 (18.0%)
Success rate (%)		
Overall	75.0%	29.8%
Males	74.3%	28.9%
Females	78.3%	34.4%

Note: 1. In October 2006, the number of DC members has dropped to 78 as 15 elected members left the Party after the election.

Sources: Suen (2003) and the Electoral Affairs Commission's website (http://www.eac.gov.hk/en/distco/2003dc_elect.htm).

candidates is a problem for both political parties. If the representation of women in the DCs is to increase, it is important that the political parties follow a more progressive strategy to increase their female party membership and to nominate more female candidates, and provide them with training, support, and the necessary resources. Since the election success rate for female candidates of both parties is higher than that of male candidates, political parties should change their election strategies in future so that women's interests have a fair and equal representation in the DCs.

LegCo Elections

As for the central level, prior to 1985 all members of the LegCo

were appointed by the Governor. LegCo began to introduce indirect elections in 1985, and direct elections in 1991. The gradual process of democratization has created new room for women to participate in formal politics. Table 10 shows that the number of female candidates running for office increased from 4 in 1985 to 26 in 2004. However, the number of female candidates seems to have reached a ceiling of 24 to 28 in the past three LegCo elections. Despite the fact that women make up half of the electorate, relatively few women reach this central level of political participation and, as yet, female representation in LegCo has not broken the 19.3% barrier.

Comparative studies on gender and democratization in other countries have shown that democratization alone is not a sufficient factor to determine the degree of improvement in the social and political status of women. The general public has demonstrated a strong desire to have a democratically elected legislature, as seen from the mass rallies on 1 July 2003 and 2004. However, we should be aware that the process of increasing democratization and the emergence of party politics since the 1990s have not automatically brought more female legislators into the LegCo. The first direct election conducted in 1991 was for 18 seats that were directly elected through geographical constituencies; six women participated but only one (Emily Lau) was able to win a seat.[7] If we compare the figures from the LegCo elections held in 1988 and those in 2004, the representation of women has dropped slightly after the gradual political opening of the legislature. Women entered LegCo as appointed members prior to 1995, but after 1995 all appointed seats in the legislature were cancelled and women have had to take part in elections (in which candidates are elected through an Election Committee, functional constituencies, or geographical constituencies). The growth in the representation of women in LegCo has been rather disappointing.

Geographical Constituency Elections

Table 11 shows that of the 13 female candidates who ran in the LegCo elections in 2004, the majority were members of a party or were affiliated with a political group or trade union. Seven of the 13 were incumbent legislators seeking re-election. All seven were re-elected

Table 10   Number of female candidates in the LegCo elections, 1985–2004

	Year of LegCo elections						
	1985	1988	1991	1995	1998	2000	2004
Number of female candidates							
Functional constituencies	1	3	1	7	6	10	13
Election Committee	3	2	0	0	4	1	—
Geographical constituencies	—	—	6	8	14	17	13
Total	4	5	7	15	24	28	26
Number of elected female councillors							
Functional constituencies	0	0	1	4	4	5	5
Election Committee	0	2	0	0	2	1	—
Geographical constituencies	—	—	1	3	4	5	6
Total	0	2	2	7	10	11	11
Number of appointed female councillors (including ex-official members)	7	9	5	0	0	0	0
Total number of female councillors	7* (12.3%)	11* (19.3%)	7* (11.7%)	7 (11.7%)	10 (16.7%)	11 (18.3%)	11 (18.3%)
Total number of councillors	57	57	60	60	60	60	60

Note: * Including ex-official members, appointed members, and elected members.

Sources: PA Professional Consultants Ltd. (1993); Tong (2003:197); and information posted on the LegCo website (http://www.legco. gov.hk).

Table 11   List of women candidates of the 2004 LegCo geographical constituency elections

Candidate	Ranking on the voting list	Party identity/Political affiliation
Hong Kong Island		
CHOY So Yuk*	2nd on a list of 6 candidates	DAB
FAN HSU, Lai Tai Rita*	1st on a list of only 1 candidate	Independent
EU Yuet Mee, Audrey*	1st on a list of 2 candidates	Basic Law Article 45 Concern Group
HO Sau Lan, Cyd	2nd on a list of 2 candidates	The Frontier, Civic Act-up
Kowloon West		
LEE Wai King, Starry	3rd on a list of 3 candidates	DAB
LEUNG Suet Fong	2nd on a list of 3 candidates	union
Kowloon East		
CHAN Yuen Han*	1st on a list of 3 candidates	Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions/DAB
New Territories West		
KONG Fung Yi	2nd on a list of 4 candidates	Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood
AU YEUNG Po Chun	4th on a list of 8 candidates	DAB
CHOW LIANG Shuk Yee, Selina*	1st on a list of 2 candidates	Liberal Party
New Territories East		
LAU Wai Hing, Emily*	2nd on a list of 7 candidates	The Frontier
HO Suk Ping, Shirley	6th on a list of 7 candidates	Democratic Party
WONG Pik Kiu	6th on a list of 7 candidates	DAB

Note: * Denotes candidate who won the election.

Source: 2004 Legislative Council Election (http://www.elections.gov.hk/elections/legco2004/english/results/rs_gc_overall.html).

except for Cyd Ho. The other six "new bloods" all failed to win election. Their failure can probably be explained by the Proportional Representation System adopted by the HKSAR government after the handover, and by the way the political parties handled their party lists. These female candidates were placed lower down the party list, and this consequently lowered their chances of success in the election. Most of the major political parties (including the DP and the DAB) handled their party lists in this way, showing that party leaders were not keen to send more women into LegCo.

Functional Constituency Elections

In 2004, there were 13 female candidates who participated in the functional constituency elections. Only five of them had a party identity or political affiliation; most of them ran for office as independent candidates. Of the five candidates who won seats, four were incumbent legislators, with only one "new blood" (Tam Heung Man) able to win a seat (Table 12).

Factors Constraining the Formal Participation of Women

The persistence of the gender gap cannot be attributed to one single factor, but rather should be seen as the result of a subtle interplay of various elements, involving gender roles, family and child-rearing responsibilities, differences in socioeconomic resources because of job inequality, institutional factors, and biased media attention (Hooghe and Stolle, 2004). Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have stressed that inequalities in the private sphere (with regard to the division of labour and power in the household) have inhibited women from participating politically in formal political institutions. The sexual division of labour in production and reproduction make it much more difficult for women to fully exercise their citizenship. Feminist theorists have also argued that any evaluation of the democratization process must take into consideration not only the level of representation of women in political institutions, but also their general position within the family and society. A political system that excludes women from participating fully and equally in political life

Table 12   List of women candidates of the 2004 LegCo functional constituency elections

Functional constituencies	Candidate	Party identity/Political affiliation
Transport	LAU Kin Yee, Miriam*	Liberal Party
Legal	NG Ngoi Yee, Margaret*	Basic Law Article 45 Concern Group
	KWONG Ka Yin	Independent
	TONG Kei Yuk, Judy	Independent
Accountancy	TAM Heung Man*	Independent
Social Welfare	FANG Meng Sang, Christine	Independent
Health Services	PONG Oi Lan, Scarlett	Independent
	SIU Kwai Fung	Independent
Labour	LI Fung Ying*	The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions
Textiles and Garment	LEUNG LAU Yau Fun, Sophie*	Liberal Party
Information Technology	LEUNG Mun Yee, Miriam	Independent
Catering	WONG Sin Yin, Lillian	Independent
	CHAN Shu Ying, Josephine	Democratic Party

Note: * Denotes candidate who won the election.

Source: 2004 Legislative Council Election (http://www.elections.gov.hk/elections/legco2004/english/results/rs_fc_overall.html).

should not be considered "democratic" (Pateman, 1988, 1989:210; Phillips, 1992:71-75; Rai, 1994:210).

Recent research in Hong Kong has pinpointed the various contextual factors that have inhibited the formal participation of women in Hong Kong. The constitutional arrangement of the Basic Law allows for only partial democracy and a slow pace of democratic transition (Tong, 2003), and acts as a hindrance to both the healthy development of party politics and the nurturance of politicians. One female councillor stressed that:

> There is no prospect in politics in Hong Kong, both in terms of personal career and in terms of monetary reward. It is difficult to entice elites to go into politics. (Hong Kong Polling and Business Research Co., 2003:55)

This constitutional setting and partial democratization, however, affects both sexes. In themselves, they cannot explain why there is a gender gap in formal participation. The gender gap can be explained by other internal (or situational) factors facing women, and by institutional factors of our political system. In a survey report, it was found that traditional thinking on gender roles and self-perception, and family responsibilities such as household duties and child care responsibilities are still contributing to the low level of political representation of women in formal political institutions. A female councillor maintained that:

> Participation in politics is very time-consuming and resource-taxing. Women from the grassroots social strata can ill afford it. (Hong Kong Polling and Business Research Co., 2003:55)

In addition to these internal factors, the institutional setting of our political system and electoral law are also hampering formal participation by women. With regard to the 2004 LegCo elections, Tables 11 and 12 show that only six women gained seats through the geographical constituencies, and only five through the functional constituencies. Both election methods are unfavourable for the participation of women, yet the reasons for this differ.

The functional constituency elections pose certain barriers to the political participation of women (Tong, 2003). Of the existing 28 functional constituencies that are responsible for the election of 30 legislators, most are male-dominated sectors such as commerce and finance, real estate and construction, engineering, transport, catering, and DC (Constitutional Development Task Force, 2004:20-21). As the current institutional arrangement has not taken into consideration the reality of gender segregation in employment, and the low labour force participation rate of women, the participation of women in functional constituency elections is unequal. Women's movement organizations have criticized the unequal electoral arrangements for women and called for functional constituency elections be abolished, with the entire legislature to be directly elected through geographical constituencies. If this cannot be achieved in 2008, the government needs to reform the current classification of functional constituencies to ensure that women have a fair chance to take part in the functional constituency elections.

Legally speaking, there has been no direct discrimination against women in the geographical constituency elections. Women enjoy the same legal right as their male counterparts to run for public office. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, there are other institutional and non-institutional factors that hinder women from participating in politics, resulting in their marginalization in both local political parties and governing institutions. The under-representation of women in governing institutions has been a worldwide phenomenon, bar the Nordic countries. To help increase the representation of women in politics and decision-making, many governments have adopted various effective measures including affirmative action to encourage the participation of women. The HKSAR government, however, has ignored the unfavourable factors affecting women and has not adopted any particular measures to address the issue of a gender imbalance in political representation. Neither the government nor most political parties in Hong Kong consider this issue to be a problem that needs to be addressed, nor do they have the strong political will or desire to increase the representation of women in the legislature. In Table 11, we can see that many female candidates were unable to win seats

because they were not placed in a winnable position by their political parties.

Institutional Design and Strengthening the Participation of Women

There are numerous ways of strengthening the participation of women in political parties and governing institutions. First, a government may adopt specific measures such as quota systems and/or reserved seats where women must make up at least a minimum proportion of the elected representatives. Political parties in a number of countries have adopted quota systems for women (Argentina, Venezuela, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and Israel). These quotas were designed to ensure that a minimum percentage of women (varying from 20% to 50%) are members of various political bodies, including their leadership and/or lists of candidates for elections. Such quotas are usually perceived as a transitional mechanism to lay the foundation for a broader acceptance of female representation. For example, Sweden, which was the first country to introduce a quota system for women in 1972, has now achieved gender parity in political representation (United Nations, 1995:216). Second, the electoral law can require parties to field a certain number of women candidates; this is the case in the proportional representation systems (list voting) of Belgium and Namibia. Third, political parties may adopt their own informal quotas for women as parliamentary candidates. This is the most common mechanism used to promote the participation of women in political life, and has been used with varying degrees of success all over the world. For example, in Sweden, the Social Democratic Party has an internal quota of a minimum of 40% women, combined with a "zipper" system (alternation of male and female candidates on the party list) (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2003:69). Reserved seats have also been set aside for women in Taiwan and other countries. Again, as with all reserved seats, these mechanisms help guarantee that women make it into elected positions of office. Recent discussions on the quota system in Taiwan suggest that a "gender ratio" for both sexes should

be introduced in the place of the existing "women quota" system (Huang, 2003).

There are also other considerations that can be applied in the proportional representation system. In addition to Sweden's "zipper" system, political parties can consider setting "closed lists" to include women in winnable positions, or allocating a percentage of head of lists to women; or giving priority to women in the allocation of electoral remainders (Corrin, 1999:182).

The HKSAR government has not adopted any measures or enabling devices to increase the proportion of women in the legislature and in the DCs. In the foreseeable future, significant improvement is unlikely unless more institutional encouragement is introduced to enable equal participation for both sexes in the formal governing institutions. The government should adopt the principle of "gender mainstreaming" in its project of political reform. The reform of the future Election Committee, as well as the reform of functional constituencies, should consider its gender impact and ensure equal participation of both sexes (Wong, 2005).

As required by the Beijing Platform for Action and the CEDAW, the HKSAR government should seek to realize the right of women to participation in all areas of public life and particularly at high levels of the decision-making process. The United Nations Committee on CEDAW has recommended that the HKSAR government study the experiences of other countries in using women/gender quotas, reserved seats, and timetables; and consider introducing suitable affirmative action and temporary special measures in its institutional design (United Nations, 1999:paragraph 322). In Hong Kong, since most political parties are male-dominated and do not exhibit strong gender sensitivity or have the political will to close the gender gap, it is the role of the HKSAR government to reform its election law and to draft laws governing both the election and the operation of political parties. These reforms should be guided by the principle of ensuring the equal participation of both sexes, and should seek to close the gender gap in formal political participation in the next five to ten years.

Pressure for the implementation of quotas and adoption of

affirmative action in reforming Hong Kong's political institutions should come not only from above but also from below. The women's movement should consider launching a campaign to achieve a gender balance in politics and to decide what kinds of measures should be adopted, and in what ways the election law and political party laws should be drafted.

Community Participation

Community, in Chaskin et al.'s (2001:8) sense, refers to "a geographical area that is recognizable by a set of attributes tied to its physical location or appearance, such as natural boundaries, a recognized history, demographic patterns, or the presence and work within it of particular industries or organizations." The term can be used interchangeably with neighbourhood. Community participation can thus be understood as the engagement of citizens, as members of a community, in activities related to a wide range of associations, from neighbourhood associations, civic clubs, neighbourhood-level business associations, community development centres, neighbourhood-based service organizations, schools, churches, universities, hospitals, and coalitions (umbrella organizations and other collaborative arrangements among local associations that operate on behalf of clusters of neighbourhoods). The mode of participation is also diverse, ranging from membership in organizations and their executive committees, activism in organizing community activities and attending group meetings, to volunteer work. While such activities may be of a primarily political or nonpolitical nature, quite often nonpolitical activities can be translated into political influence. Worldwide, community participation is increasingly viewed as important action that will bring about empowerment and better public service.

Inclusiveness and diversity are regarded as important values of community participation (Reid, 2000). On the other hand, all over the world, women are still often excluded from meaningful participation in public life. Factors commonly recognized as hindering their

participation are the process of gender socialization, the differential access and utilization of channels for participation, differences in resources such as time and money, the patriarchal nature of social organizations, and social attitudes at large (Lee, 2000).

Such factors seem to have held Hong Kong women back from community participation. For instance, Lee (2000) found that as a whole, there was a low level of community participation in Hong Kong in terms of organizational membership. Where women participated, they tended to concentrate on organizations such as women's centres, community service centres, and religious organizations, where they were probably receiving service. There is definite evidence to show that women are under-represented as community leaders. Women currently constitute 17.9% of District Councillors. They have been found to be much less likely to hold executive positions in social organizations, and hence tend to be less influential in community affairs (Lee, 2000). Social attitudes are also less favourable towards female leaders as compared with male leaders (Tam, 1993; Tang, 1993; Lee, 2000). Women tend to be confined by their gender role as caretakers of the family (Tam 1993; Tang 1993). Other studies have also shown that women have fewer resources to participate, especially in terms of time. Women assume a heavier burden of housework and have less free time than men (Census and Statistics Department, 2004).

Apart from these general reasons, the public participation of women is often structured by institutions. In the case of Hong Kong, Fischler's (2003) study has shown how the colonial institution and the history of political development have structured the public participation of women. Put briefly, there was a strategic alliance between the colonial state and the Chinese male traditional and merchant elites. The colonial state offered the Chinese male elites status and honour and preservation of the patriarchal social system in return for their partnership in governance. Following this line of argument that colonial domination relied on Chinese patriarchy as part of its institutional setup, we contend that women were disadvantaged in community participation as a result of the institution of local governance constructed by the colonial state. Such colonial institutions have been inherited by the postcolonial government, which

continues to utilize them as institutions of social control. The HKSAR government has inherited the local administrative system of its colonial predecessors, which had used local institutions as administrative tools for top-down control, cooptation, and political surveillance. Such state control of participatory space has been particularly detrimental to the participation of women. As will be shown later, state dominance in local governance has resulted in a highly patriarchal participatory culture, which leads to the marginalization of women.

History of the Development of Community-based Governance

The relationship between the state and community groups has been very much shaped by the history of colonialism. In the history of British rule, civic associations have been subjected to selective intervention by the colonial authority, ranging from passive tolerance, cooptation, and administrative control to political suppression. The early history of the development of civil society testified to such selective interventions. Colonial Hong Kong was largely a migrant society; the early settlers, mostly from mainland China, developed a robust system of communal self-governance through temples, clan organizations, merchant guilds, and so on. Among the neighbourhood-based associations were the District Watch Committees and the *kaifong*, a form of neighbourhood association that had long existed in South China (Tsai, 1993). Many of these communal organizations were led by male merchant elites who naturally excluded women, and the colonial government generally tolerated their existence. On the other hand, the state intervened in the running of civic organizations such as the Tung Wah Hospital and the Po Leung Kuk, which were found to be threatening to the state as a result of their immense power and social influence (Sinn, 1989).

By the 1950s, an administrative system of surveillance was developed under the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, with the aim of guarding against the infiltration of civic groups by "subversive elements" (Wong, 1972:106). Among the communal associations to be watched closely were the *kaifongs*. *Kaifongs* were revived by the colonial government after WWII as a way to provide charity, relief, schooling, medical services, and recreational facilities to residents.

Liaison Officers from the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs would try to establish personal ties and to cultivate good relations with the *kaifong* leaders, and reward those who were subservient by granting them honours and other public positions. The position thus tended to attract traditionalists who were seeking social status and business advantages through making proper social and political connections. Such community groups thus became, in the eyes of the government, important pro-establishment forces (Lee, 2005).

This method of managing state-society relations was extended to the system of local administration established in the late 1960s. The City District Office (CDO) scheme was established in 1968 after the social riots of 1966 and 1967. District Offices were first established in the New Territories in the early days of colonial rule as a way of exercising indirect rule. With the CDO scheme, the urban area was divided into ten areas, each managed by a CDO and headed by a District Officer. Officially, these CDOs were to function as a link, if not a channel of communication, between the government and the people. In actuality, the CDOs became the "antennae" of the colonial government, detecting any potential dissatisfaction at an early stage, and also acted as its appendages for penetrating society. Each CDO oversees a City District Committee, an Area Committee, and, from the early 1980s, a DB (renamed DC in 2000), mutual aid committees, and other local organizations set up by the Home Affairs Department and other government units for various purposes, e.g., the District Fight Crime Committee and the Junior Police Call. A CDO liaises with community organizations such as the *kaifongs*, local business associations, neighbourhood-based organizations, women's organizations, NGOs and their local service centres, ethnic associations, recreational clubs, and so on.

The Gender Consequence of the Current System of Local Governance

The major political goal of the system of district administration was for the colonial government to nurture local leaders that were pro-establishment. Local committees, councils, and community-based organizations were not sites for the articulation of popular opinion

or for the genuine participation of residents in deciding on issues that they were really concerned about. Rather they were sites for political control.

The mechanisms of control are multiple. First, the state controls the appointment of personnel to the Area Committees and to many local boards and committees. One of the District Officer's jobs is to observe the behaviour of local leaders in organizations such as the mutual aid committees and the *kaifongs*. Those people who have consistently demonstrated a subservient and pro-establishment attitude will then be recruited to the Area Committees and local boards and committees. Such a system of reward tends to attract conservative figures, often small businessman, who are looking for status and honours.

Second, a system such as this results in the development of extensive patron-client relationships not only between the state and local leaders, but also between the leaders and their followers. In a patron-client relationship, the client is supposed to show obedience and respect to the patron, who in return is obligated to sponsor the client. Essentially, people who are interested in serving the community through established channels would have to get into the network, as the local leaders would hold the power to "refer" suitable candidates to the state. Likewise, outsiders would have to establish a relationship with the immediate followers of the leaders in order to get into the inner circle. In such a system, women often find it hard to get into the network. They may serve as low-level volunteers but cannot become leaders. Occasionally, where there are women leaders, more often than not they adopt the same style of leadership that is entrenched in the dominant system. The woman leader will often behave like a "godmother", recruiting and rewarding followers who are loyal to her while she offers her support to the state.

Third, the formation of networks is often complicated by other social organizations. One such category is ethnic groups. Far from the popular image of a fully integrated migrant society with a homogenous identity, ethnic politics is alive and well in some areas. For instance, local business may be dominated by an ethnic group, as seen in the dominance of Chiuchowese in the dried seafood business

in the Central and Western districts of the Island. In such situations, community leaders may form a rather closed circle making it difficult for outsiders to get in. Women, being traditionally excluded from such groups, would have a slim chance of rising to power through such channels.

Fourth, state control over the recruitment of local leaders is also fostered through state control over funding for local associations. The District Office provides a small sum of money to associations for organizing community functions. Associations holding recreational and cultural functions, activities that are traditionally considered "appropriate" by the District Office, will receive funding. Thus, state funding serves as a form of control over associational life, as associations that hold activities considered contentious by the state will not be sponsored. Such funding mechanisms serve to perpetuate the existing patriarchal networks of power.

New Space for Community Participation and
Its Gender Implications

Despite the imposition of top-down control by the state apparatus, developments in the past two to three decades have changed the societal landscape. The question is whether this new societal landscape offers more room for community participation from the bottom up and, if so, whether women are benefiting from it.

One such change has been the democratization of the political system, including the development of political parties. At the local level, many of the district councillors now have a political party background. The fielding of candidates for elections is decided by the political parties. As discussed in the previous sections, political parties have not been particularly conducive to opening up opportunities for women to become public leaders. This has been largely attributed to the lack of executive power. In the DCs, the modest annual budget was often divided up among the councillors to fund their own constituency works, which often entailed organizing recreational activities that served only parochial interests. Such a practice has

the effect of reinforcing the advantage of the incumbents and their followers. Individuals who aspire to change the status quo will find little space to do so. This situation is not conducive to the participation of women who want to make a difference. Despite this, in the past few years, in some districts more progressive candidates, among them a couple of women, have managed to get elected by producing campaign platforms that offer alternatives to the status quo.

Second, NGOs, through their social service and community building work, have been a major source of grassroots empowerment. Many NGOs operate service and community centres under state funding, while others receive most of their funding from private donors. In past decades, through their community-building activities, NGOs have empowered the grassroots population to fight for their social rights, and have helped nurture community leaders. NGOs that are financially independent from the government have been found to be more able to carve out their own space. In recent years, collaboration between NGOs and progressive local politicians has not been uncommon.

Third, various social groups largely excluded from official channels of participation are increasingly organizing themselves to fight for their interests. This is evident, for instance, in some cases of urban redevelopment. Women are involved in these instances of activism and have emerged as community leaders. Such locally based activism can spill over into other territory-wide issues, as activists, upon participating in local affairs, are mobilized to participate in collective actions related to other issues. An example of one such case is the redevelopment of the Hopewell Centre into a "MegaTower" (a hotel project) in Wanchai. A group of middle-class women organized themselves to protest against the redevelopment project for the reason that it would have a detrimental effect on the value of their real estate property. Some of these women leaders later became participants in social campaigns related to the reclamation of the Victoria Harbour and the West Kowloon Cultural District project. There is also evidence that these women activists are collaborating with the more progressive women district councillors to fight for their interests.

Conclusion

The conventional understanding of women and political participation assumes that gender differences in political participation will gradually disappear as the process of modernization accelerates, and women become able to catch up with men in the fields of education, professional careers, and income. This paper shows that this assumption is only partly correct. In the first section of this paper, we observed certain improvements in gender representation among the ranks of Permanent Secretaries of the Civil Service, and in the judges of District Courts. These improvements can be seen as a product of the increasing educational opportunities for women in higher education. However, gender differences with regard to participation in governing institutions and participation as candidates in the electoral process have proven to be remarkably persistent. Moreover, even where the gender gap has decreased, it has done so at a very slow pace. This paper shows that the representation of women in the DCs increased from 10.1% in 1982 to 17.9% in 2005, while there has been no improvement in the representation of women in LegCo when compared with 1988 and on a high of 19.3%.

As to community participation, the long history of state penetration into the local community through the district administrative apparatus has resulted in a community leadership culture that is conservative, paternalistic, patriarchal, and hierarchical. Such a community culture contributes to the exclusion of women from leadership positions. The postcolonial state has largely inherited such an administrative apparatus and has little incentive to reform it. One major reason for this is that, lacking in popular legitimacy, the postcolonial authoritarian state relies on pro-establishment forces as a source of support. Conversely, such control over the recruitment of formal leaders also ensures that anti-government forces will not have access to formal positions of power. The persistence of such a structure of power, however, largely goes against societal changes towards more pluralistic interests and a heightened democratic consciousness, which necessitate the opening up of channels for popular participation.

In Hong Kong, popular elections at all three levels (the election of the Chief Executive, LegCo, and DC) remain an objective that has yet to be achieved. Given this state of affairs, it is understandable that much of the attention and energy of the pro-democracy movement of the past two decades has focused on the expansion of elected seats in LegCo and in the DCs, as well as on the popular election of the Chief Executive. This laudable aim, however, has resulted in a relative neglect of other important issues, not the least among which is the gender gap in the governing institutions, the electoral process, and participation at the community level. We have demonstrated that, despite the opening up of the administrative structure and political processes, this gender gap has proved to be rather stubborn and deep-rooted.

Notes

1. See "Platform for Action," (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html, retrieved on 4 June 2005).

2. The four female members of the Executive Council are: Sarah Liao Sau-tung, Denise Yue Chung-yee, Selina Chow Liang Shuk-yee, and Laura M. Cha.

3. See also Census and Statistics Department (2004:104).

4. Calculation based on Home Affairs Bureau (2005).

5. See also Appendix I "2003 Final Register Geographical Constituencies: Age and Sex Profile" of the *Report on the 2003 District Council Election* (Electoral Affairs Commission, 2004).

6. See *Sing Pao Daily News*, 18 May 2005, p. A05, and "Legislators' Ratings Take a Hammering," *South China Morning Post*, 23 February 2005.

7. The six female candidates were: Emily Lau (elected), Leung Wai-tung, Chow Kit-bing, Cheung Wai-sun, Chan Yuen-han, and Yeung Lai-yin.

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Gender and Political Participation in Hong Kong
Formal Participation and Community Participation

Abstract

This paper examines three aspects of gender and political participation in Hong Kong. We analysed gender participation in the formal governing institutions, the electoral processes, and in the community. We found that women were under-represented at both the central and local levels of governing institutions, and in the top tiers of the administrative and judicial systems. The proportion of women in advisory and statutory bodies has remained relatively low. While there is no significant gender gap in the number of registered voters and in voter turnout rates, the proportion of women candidates remains low in both the District Council and Legislative Council elections. In political parties, women are under-represented in party membership as well as in the nomination of candidates for elections. The persistence of a gender gap in formal participation is the result of the interplay of various elements, including gender roles, familial responsibilities, differences in socioeconomic resources, the constitutional setting and partial democratization, as well as the lack of affirmative action in pursuing gender equality in political representation. Gender segregation in employment and the low labour force participation rate of women have particularly contributed to inequality in functional constituency elections. Experiences from other countries indicate that adopting quota systems and reforming electoral laws may help strengthen the formal participation of women. Similar to formal participation, in community participation women face the challenge of gender socialization as well as differential access to resources and channels for participation. The long history of state penetration into the local community through the district administrative apparatus has resulted in a community leadership culture that is conservative, paternalistic, patriarchal, and hierarchical, which contributes to the exclusion of women from leadership positions.

香港兩性的政治參與
正規政治參與及社區政治參與

黃碧雲　李詠怡

（中文摘要）

　　本文從三個層面分析香港兩性的政治參與，包括在正規管治架構、議會選舉和社區層面的參與。研究發現，在中央和地區的兩層議會架構、政府行政架構和司法機構的領導層，以及各諮詢和法定組織中，女性的參與和代表性均遠遜於男性。在選舉層面的參與方面，雖然兩性的選民登記率和投票率已沒有實質差異，但在區議會和立法會選舉中，女性候選人的數目仍遠低於男性，原因在於香港各政黨的黨員以男性居多，各政黨亦較少提名女性候選人角逐各級議會選舉。本文作者指出，香港正規政治參與呈現持續性的性別差距可歸咎於下列因素：兩性在性別角色、家庭崗位和社經資源上的差異、憲制規範及局部民主化的窒礙，以及香港政府和各政黨欠缺有助促進兩性平等參政的措施等。此外，男女勞工的行業與職業分隔，及女性較低的勞動力參與率，均令女性難於循功能界別選舉與男性公平角逐立法會議席。外國經驗顯示，引進性別保障名額制度及修訂選舉法，有助促進女性的正規政治參與。女性在社區層面的政治參與同樣要面對性別社教化、資源匱乏和參與渠道不足的挑戰。長期以來，香港政府透過各種地方行政組織滲入社區之中，它所塑造的是一套保守、家長式、父權式、層級化的社區領導文化，令女性難以躋身社區組織領導之列。

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