

Taking Both Sides into Consideration
Ambivalence in Public Opinion on
Political Reform in Hong Kong

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Introduction

The degree to which the Hong Kong people support democratization has long been a subject of academic and public debate. While opinion polls have repeatedly shown that a majority of citizens support a faster pace of democratization, conservative politicians and government leaders believe that Hong Kong citizens prefer stability and prosperity to an expansion of political rights. Some researchers have argued that Hong Kong people only have a “partial vision” of democracy (Kuan and Lau, 1995, 2002): they understand democratization to be the development of consultative government rather than the institutionalization of elections. Lui (2003) has described the Hong Kong middle class as a “rearguard” with regard to political orientation: they seem to be more concerned with defending their existing rights and freedoms than with striving for additional rights and freedoms.

These arguments reflect the fact that the public’s feelings about democratization in Hong Kong are complex. Similar complexities were also found in the results of a poll on citizens’ attitudes towards the political reform proposal put forward by the Special Administrative Region (SAR) government in 2005. The proposal was criticized by the democrats as overly conservative. But two weeks before the legislature voted against the proposal, an opinion poll conducted by the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong (2005) found that 44.2% of respondents actually supported the proposal. Only 17.1% of the respondents opposed it. Significantly,

nearly 40% of the respondents either answered “don’t know” or chose the neutral category.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Hong Kong citizens do not support a faster pace of democratization. In the same survey, when the respondents were asked whether they supported the inclusion in the political reform proposal of a timetable for democratization, more than 50% replied in the affirmative. When the respondents were asked when would be the appropriate time to institutionalize direct elections of the Chief Executive, 7.4% replied “the sooner the better,” 19.1% chose “in or before 2007” even though this had already been ruled out by the Chinese government, and another 34.7% chose “between 2008 and 2012.” In other words, the majority of Hong Kong citizens still support a faster pace of democratization in principle, yet may not oppose a reform proposal that fails to fully meet their preferences.

There are different ways to examine and understand the above opinion poll results. One might question whether people are only paying lip service to democracy, rendering apparent endorsement of abstract principles without actually supporting the relevant concrete policies (Jackman, 1978; Chan, Chau and Lee, 2002). One might also interpret the results as an indication that Hong Kong people are highly materialistic and overwhelmingly pragmatic in their value orientations, and that the age of “post-materialism” (Inglehart, 1990) has not yet arrived despite an economy that is in an advanced stage of development. While these two approaches point to important issues that need to be addressed, they tend to reduce the issue to one of a simple opposition between abstract moral-political principles and pragmatic materialistic concerns. They also implicitly treat principle-based opinions as more valuable than opinions based on materialistic concerns.

In this paper we examine the complexities of public opinions on democratic reform in Hong Kong by beginning with another set of assumptions. We contend that if public opinions on the issue appear to be complicated and apparently inconsistent, this is only to be expected because the issue of democratic reform itself is highly complicated. Democratic reform involves conflicts that arise from having different legitimate concerns; information about democratic reform is also far

from perfect. In this situation, it is *normal for concerned citizens to be ambivalent, i.e., to have both positive and negative feelings and considerations towards the issue of democratic reform.*

By recognizing the fact that people seldom hold purely positive or negative attitudes towards a complicated issue or object, the concept of ambivalence raises an important set of questions for public opinion researchers. We believe that the concept could help clarify certain issues about public opinions towards democratization in Hong Kong. The next two sections further explicate the concept and how it has been examined by public opinion researchers. The issue of democratic reform in Hong Kong is then further discussed and research questions are set up. This is followed by an analysis of data derived from a survey of the population. The implications of the findings are discussed in the conclusion.

The Concept of Attitudinal Ambivalence

In the field of psychology, attitudes have been measured with bipolar rating scales since the first decades of the twentieth century. Underlying the bipolar measure is the conceptual assumption that an attitude “is reducible to the net difference between the positive and negative valent processes aroused by a stimulus” because “positively and negatively valent activation functions are reciprocally controlled” (Cacioppo and Berntson, 1994:401). The principle of reciprocal activation means that when positive feelings or thoughts are activated, negative feelings or thoughts are de-activated. Hence, when a person holds positive feelings towards an object, he or she will have few negative feelings towards the same object.

This conceptualization provides a useful and simple way to study attitudes. But it fails to capture an important aspect of people’s everyday experiences. People can “love and hate” each other. They can recognize good reasons to support and good reasons to oppose a line of action. As the folktale goes, an old man with a son who sells umbrellas and another son who sells fireworks is bound to feel both good and bad on both rainy and sunny days. Positive and negative thoughts and feelings can be activated simultaneously, and

are not always easy to reconcile. The result is a state of attitudinal ambivalence.

More formally, psychologists have conceptualized ambivalence as “the co-existence of positive and negative dispositions toward an attitude object” (Ajzen, 2001:39). Many researchers have further distinguished objective from subjective ambivalence. Objective ambivalence refers to the mere co-existence of positive and negative dispositions, thoughts, or feelings. But holding both negative and positive thoughts does not mean that a person will find it difficult to arrive at an overall view. Sometimes people may think that the reasons on one side are, although valid, much weaker than the reasons on the other side. Sophisticated individuals may succeed in reconciling or articulating the conflicting reasons into a coherent whole. Hence, objective ambivalence is different from subjective ambivalence, which refers to the actual feeling of conflict (Priester and Petty, 1996). While objective ambivalence can be a cause of subjective ambivalence, Holbrook and Krosnick (2005) have found that the two are distinct from each other. They are not strongly correlated and have different effects on various social psychological phenomena.

But regardless of whether the subjective or objective notion is concerned, central to the concept of ambivalence is the understanding that positive and negative thoughts and feelings towards the same object are separable from each other. In fact, many studies have shown that, when measured separately, positive and negative thoughts/feelings towards an object are only weakly correlated or even not correlated at all (Cacioppo and Berntson, 1994; Thompson, Zanna and Griffin, 1995; Cacioppo, Gardner and Berntson, 1997).

Ambivalence in Public Opinion Studies

Many political scientists and communication researchers have recognized the significance of the concept of ambivalence to public opinion studies. First, the concept raises the obvious question of the extent to which people are ambivalent on various matters (Miller and Peterson, 2004). Political scientists in the US do not completely agree with each other on this issue. For example, Cantril and Cantril (1999)

have contended that about one-third of Americans can be regarded as ambivalent about the role that the government plays in society: many people are opposed to the general idea of increasing government spending, but support specific policies that require an increase in such spending. Beedle and Taylor-Gooby (1983) found that people who support the idea of the welfare state may have reservations about the existing welfare system. McGraw and Bartels (2005) found that the majority of Americans were at least weakly ambivalent towards the country's main political institutions. Citrin and Luks (2005) reported that mixed feelings towards the nation were widespread. However, Steenbergen and Brewer (2004:121) disagreed with these judgements, and stated that "Americans experience only relatively mild levels of ambivalence [across a range of issues] and that this ambivalence does not influence public opinion dramatically" (also see Albertson, Brehm and Alvarez, 2005; Jacoby, 2005).

Not surprisingly, judgements about the degree of ambivalence among the public differ according to the issues that are being examined (McGraw and Bartels, 2005), the measures that are being used, and how the results are interpreted. It is enough to note, without getting into the technical details, that those who argue for "widespread" ambivalence usually adopt a relatively minimal standard of what constitutes ambivalence, such as the simultaneous holding of at least some positive and negative thoughts toward an object (e.g., Meffert, Guge and Lodge, 2004). Those who argue against the existence of widespread ambivalence, on the other hand, usually adopt a more stringent standard of ambivalence, such as emphasizing the subjective feeling of internal conflicts (e.g., Albertson et al., 2005).

Ambivalence has consequences for political attitudes, the processing of information, and participation. First, it has implications for issues such as attitude accessibility and the use of memory-based information processing (Lavine, Borgida and Sullivan, 2000; McGraw, Hasecke and Conger, 2003; Newby-Clark, McGregor and Zanna, 2005). More specifically, when a person has mixed feelings towards an issue or a politician, it is reasonable to expect that his or her overall attitude towards the issue or politician would be less extreme and less certain than one whose views are clear-cut (Meffert et al.,

2004). The former individual is therefore more likely to be persuaded than the latter, and his or her opinion would tend to become less stable than the latter's (Zaller and Feldman, 1992; Hill and Kriesi, 2001; Lavine, 2001).

Some studies have also shown that attitudinal ambivalence has a negative impact on political participation. Mutz's (2002) analysis of data derived from the 1992 US presidential elections showed that people who were ambivalent towards the candidates were less likely to vote and more likely to have made a late decision on whom to vote for. The same findings were reported by Nir (2005). Lavine (2001) also found that ambivalence relates to late decision making in the electoral context.¹

It should be noted that ambivalence, similar to certainty, extremity, accessibility, strength, and other characteristics, is essentially an aspect of an attitude. That is, while a person may have an overall positive attitude towards a politician, we may question whether the attitude is certain, strong, accessible, ambivalent, and so on. These characteristics of an attitude may affect the extent to which the attitude can influence other attitudes and behaviour. For example, while we expect that a positive attitude towards a candidate would lead to a vote for the candidate, we can also expect this attitude-behaviour linkage to be stronger if the positive attitude towards the candidate is strong, accessible, certain, and non-ambivalent. In other words, attitudinal ambivalence can moderate the relationship between the attitude concerned and other attitudes and behaviour. Empirical research has indeed discovered such a moderating influence. Lavine (2001) found that ambivalence on issues weakens the influence of issue proximity on vote choice. Similarly, Basinger and Lavine (2005) found that ambivalence towards political parties weakens the impact of party identification on vote choice in US presidential elections.

As ambivalence has important effects on political opinions and behaviour, it is also important to understand its causes. The "core value" approach argues that public opinions are structured not by consistent, overarching ideologies (see Converse, 1964, 1970) but by a number of diverse core values and beliefs. Such core values and beliefs may come into conflict when specific policy issues are

discussed. Abortion, for example, involves the conflict between the belief in the value of life and in an individual's freedom of choice. As a result, people are particularly likely to be ambivalent on these issues (Feldman and Zaller, 1992; Craig, Martinez, Kane and Gainous, 2005). The ambivalence that is generated is subjective; it involves not only the co-existence of contrary thoughts and feelings but also the actual feeling of internal conflict (Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 1998; Alvarez, 1997).

Others have conducted research on how ambivalence may result from the communication of counter-attitudinal messages through interpersonal networks or the media. People in modern, pluralistic societies are likely to be located within politically heterogeneous networks (Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague, 2004). The more heterogeneous the network is, the more likely a person is to receive conflicting views, arguments, and information (Mutz, 2006). Hence, network heterogeneity relates positively to attitudinal ambivalence (Priester and Petty, 2001; Mutz, 2002; Huckfeldt, Mendez and Osborn, 2004; Visser and Mirabile, 2004). In addition, Price, Nir and Cappella's (2005) experimental study has shown that participants who listened to an issue framed in ways that oppose their beliefs tended to show a greater degree of ambivalence. Most recently, Holbert and Hansen (2006) examined the impact of viewing *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a documentary highly critical of the Bush administration's stance on the issue of terrorism. The results found that viewing the documentary led to lower levels of ambivalence towards Bush among Democrats and higher levels of ambivalence among Republicans, especially those with a high need for closure (i.e., a strong preference for certain over uncertain knowledge).

While studies on social networks and communication have focused on the information environment within which individuals are embedded, ambivalence is also related to how people process the information available to them. Lavine, Borgida, and Sullivan (2000) found that attitudinal involvement relates negatively to ambivalence. This is because people who are more involved in an issue are more likely than those who are less involved to process information in a biased manner in order to defend their existing attitudes. They are

likely to dismiss reasons that contradict their attitudes and accept only those that support their views. Conversely, when people are less involved, they are more likely than those who are more involved to process information in an unbiased manner, and hence more likely to accept the validity of reasons from both sides.

It should be noted that discussions of ambivalence in studies on public opinion are often tied to a concern over the rationality of public opinions. The early works of Converse (1964, 1970) and the repeated findings in survey research on the effects of question wording and order have called into question the quality of citizens' views on public affairs. Converse's original view was that such instability of response represents "non-attitudes," i.e., the absence of true attitudes and ideas in the mind of the public. Within this theoretical context, to argue that citizens are ambivalent and that such ambivalence can explain response instability as well as the effects of wording and order in surveys (Zaller, 1992; Zaller and Feldman, 1992; Hill and Kriesi, 2001) is actually to argue that the public is rational. This is because ambivalence refers not to the absence of information and considerations, but to the presence of conflicting information and considerations. It portrays people as willing to look at an issue "from both sides" instead of stubbornly sticking to one version of the story.

Therefore, most of the recent writings on ambivalence have tended to put the notion in a positive light. Cantril and Cantril (1999), for example, stressed that ambivalence is not consistently related to a lack of knowledge about politics or attention paid to it. Being "pro and con" towards different issues does not contradict the role of being an informed citizen. Albertson, Brehm, and Alvarez (2005) even showed that subjective ambivalence correlates positively with education and political knowledge.

In sum, the concept of ambivalence points to the plausibly widespread scenario of citizens holding both positive and negative thoughts and feelings towards specific issues and objects. Given the complexities of many public issues, ambivalence is normal, and may even be desirable. Ambivalence also has an important impact on the formation and characteristics of political opinions and behaviour. However, research on the causes and consequences of ambivalence in

political opinions has just begun to accumulate in recent years. While the above-cited studies were mostly conducted in the US, this study examines attitudinal ambivalence in the case of Hong Kong people's opinions towards democratic reform.

Background and Research Questions

It should not be difficult to provide examples of ambivalence in the arena of politics and public opinion in Hong Kong. Discontent towards the administration of Tung Chee-hwa could have co-existed with the acknowledgement that Tung is a "good old man" in the minds of many Hong Kong people. Many people who opposed the national security legislation in 2003 claimed that they were nonetheless patriotic. On the issue of democratic reform, it is probably true that many Hong Kong people support democratization *and* are concerned with the potential negative consequences of a direct confrontation with the central government.

We argue that democratic reform is an issue about which Hong Kong citizens are particularly likely to feel at least somewhat ambivalent. First of all, the issue involves a conflict between the value of freedom and democracy on the one hand, and the value of social and political stability on the other.² As stated at the beginning of this paper, many Hong Kong people who support democracy in principle nevertheless did not oppose the government's reform proposal in 2005. At the same time, while opinion polls at the time showed that about 17% of respondents opposed the government's proposal and while nearly 100,000 people participated in the December 4th rally, it is highly plausible that these "hardcore" supporters of democracy would prefer a stable society over an unstable one if the factor of democracy is "kept constant." Democrats in Hong Kong may believe that people should place a higher priority on democracy over stability, while conservatives may regard stability as far more important. But many ordinary citizens may not feel that one clearly takes priority over the other.

Second, the issue of democratic reform is highly complicated. Since it came to the fore of the social agenda at the beginning of

2004, the debates surrounding the issue have covered, among other things, the meanings and relevance of patriotism and the national identification of Hong Kong people, the “core values” of the Hong Kong public, the civic quality of Hong Kong people, the possible rise of populism as a consequence of democratization and, thus, the relationship between democracy and economic growth. At various points, legal questions such as the proper interpretations of certain stipulations in the Basic Law were raised. On such a multifaceted issue, it is unlikely that many people would be holding purely positive or negative thoughts and feelings towards the specific plans and proposals that have been raised.

Third, there is a high degree of uncertainty surrounding some key issues and questions in democratic reform. Despite taking a much more active role in the political reform debate since early 2004, the Chinese government has continued to use the “strategy of ambiguity” (Cheung, 2003) in communicating with the Hong Kong public. They have not given clear signals on what they would definitely accept or not accept (e.g., are direct elections in 2012 to select the Chief Executive acceptable to the central government?). As a result, the Hong Kong media has been left to play guessing games on questions such as the “bottom line” of the Chinese government, the extent to which space is available for Chief Executive Donald Tsang to put forward a more progressive reform proposal, and so on. Ambiguity and uncertainty in the information environment means that citizens need to ponder over a larger number of possible scenarios; thus, they are more likely to develop a feeling of ambivalence about the issue.

Last, but not least, the debate over political reform has featured a contest within the formal political institution between government leaders and conservative politicians on one side, and pro-democracy politicians on the other. In this situation, ambivalence would not be as much of an issue if pro-democracy citizens also hold strongly positive views towards the pro-democracy politicians and negative views towards the conservative politicians. However, many studies have shown that Hong Kong people have a strong distrust of politicians in general (Lau, 1994, 1998). The image of the democrats, in particular, has been tarnished in recent years due to a number of scandals and media

reports of internal conflicts. In fact, in our own study of participants in pro-democracy rallies in Hong Kong we found that some participants were worried about the possibility of being misinterpreted or even manipulated by the democrats (Lee and Chan, forthcoming). On the other side, pro-democracy citizens may criticize Donald Tsang for his apparent unwillingness to push democracy forward. Yet they may also acknowledge Tsang's record as a competent civil servant. As there are no absolute heroes or villains in this struggle, it is unlikely that the public would hold a purely positive or negative view on the issue of democratic reform.

Certainly, the above discussion only points to reasons for ambivalence to be pervasive in the case of democratic reform. An empirical analysis needs to be carried out on the actual extent and manifestation of Hong Kong people's ambivalence. Based on existing research on the concept of ambivalence and the context of democratization in Hong Kong, the following analysis aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: Do Hong Kong people have mixed considerations towards the SAR government's political reform proposal in 2005 (i.e., to what extent are Hong Kong people experiencing objective ambivalence on the issue)?
- RQ2: To what extent do Hong Kong people feel conflicted about the reform proposal (i.e., are Hong Kong people subjectively ambivalent towards the issue)?
- RQ3: What factors can predict ambivalence towards political reform?

Moreover, we are interested in examining the consequences of ambivalence. To recapitulate, past research has shown that ambivalence can lead to less extreme attitudes, since the mixed considerations should pull individuals away from developing extreme opinions. Studying the extremity of attitudes can be important because this can shed light on the degree of polarization that is likely to exist in public opinion. In addition, having mixed considerations can also lead to difficulties in making a clear-cut decision to support or oppose a line of action, thus making political participation less likely. Moreover,

ambivalence is essentially an aspect of specific attitudes. It can affect the degree to which the attitudes concerned can influence other attitudes and predict behaviour.

Based on these arguments, we set up hypotheses on the interrelationships among attitudinal ambivalence towards the SAR government's reform proposal, overall attitude towards the reform proposal, and participation in the December 4th rally. The December 4th rally was organized to oppose the Tsang administration's reform bill and to call for a faster pace of democratization. Hence, overall support for the reform bill should relate negatively to participation in the December 4th rally. Meanwhile, ambivalence towards the reform bill can be expected to affect: (1) the extremity of the overall attitude towards the reform bill, (2) the likelihood of participating in pro-democracy protests, and (3) the attitude-behaviour linkage; that is, the extent to which overall attitude towards the reform bill predicts participation in the December 4th rally. The following six hypotheses are stated:

- H1: Objective ambivalence about the SAR government's reform proposal relates negatively to the extremity of the overall attitude towards the proposal.
- H2: Subjective ambivalence about the SAR government's reform proposal relates negatively to the extremity of the overall attitude towards the proposal.
- H3: Objective ambivalence about the reform proposal relates negatively to participation in the pro-democracy rally.
- H4: Subjective ambivalence about the reform proposal relates negatively to participation in the pro-democracy rally.
- H5: Objective ambivalence about the reform proposal weakens the relationship between overall support for the proposal and participation in the pro-democracy rally.
- H6: Subjective ambivalence about the reform proposal weakens the relationship between overall support for the proposal and participation in the pro-democracy rally.

Although past research has shown that subjective and objective ambivalence can have different causes and consequences, we do not

have well-developed theories from which more specific hypotheses can be derived. For the purpose of the present paper it is not necessary to develop such theoretical arguments. Therefore, for the sake of parsimony the above hypotheses assume objective and subjective ambivalence to have similar consequences. Certainly, an analysis of the data will show whether this is the case.

Method, Data, and Operationalization

The data analysed in this study were derived from a telephone survey conducted in late February and early March 2006, by the Quality Evaluation Centre at the City University of Hong Kong. Six hundred Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong permanent residents aged between 18 and 70 were interviewed. A systematic sample of telephone numbers was first generated by referring to the most recent residential telephone directories. The last digit of each telephone number was increased by 1 in order to include unlisted numbers. When a household was reached, the most recent birthday method was used to select the target respondent. The survey yielded a response rate of 56.6% following the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) formula 1 and a response rate of 33.0% following the AAPOR formula 6.³

The measurement of ambivalence is discussed in the next section. The operationalizations of other major variables are as follows:

Political efficacy. The respondents were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), whether they agreed with six statements: (1) I have enough ability to understand political issues (mean = 2.81, S.D. = 1.25), (2) I have the ability to discuss public affairs (mean = 2.89, S.D. = 1.28), (3) Hong Kong people's collective actions have great influence on public affairs (mean = 3.50, S.D. = 1.12), (4) Hong Kong people's collective actions can improve the society (mean = 3.22, S.D. = 1.30), (5) the current political system in Hong Kong can effectively respond to public opinion (mean = 2.61, S.D. = 1.13), and (6) the current SAR government can effectively respond to public opinion (mean = 2.74,

S.D. = 1.16). The figures for the first two statements were averaged to form an index of internal efficacy ($r = .58$). Those for the next two were averaged to form an index of collective efficacy ($r = .49$). The figures for the last two statements were averaged to form an index of external efficacy ($r = .65$).

Concern with political reform. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they were concerned about the events surrounding the legislature's move to vote down the government's political reform proposal in December. Answers were recorded according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = very unconcerned to 5 = very concerned (mean = 3.14, S.D. = 0.95).

Attention to media. The respondents were asked to indicate, employing a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low attention, 5 = very high attention), the degree to which they paid attention to news reports about the debate over political reform: (1) on television (mean = 3.22, S.D. = 0.96), and (2) in newspapers (mean = 3.12, S.D. = 1.03). In other words, the "media attention" that was being measured is specific to the issue under study. Attention to newspapers and to television news turned out to be highly correlated ($r = .64$). Hence, a single index was created by averaging the figures for the two items.

Interpersonal political discussions. The variable of interpersonal political discussions is also issue specific. The respondents were asked to indicate, on a four-point scale ranging from 1 = never to 4 = often, how frequently they discussed the issue with: (1) family members (mean = 1.90, S.D. = 0.88), and (2) friends (mean = 1.96, S.D. = 0.95). The figures for the two items were averaged to form a single index ($r = .49$).

Attitude towards the government's reform proposal. The respondents were asked to indicate, using a four-point scale (1 = strongly oppose, 4 = strongly support), whether they supported the government's political reform proposal (mean = 2.69, S.D. = 0.67). For those who indicated support, a follow-up question asked whether they were accepting the reform proposal "gladly" (34.7%), "with reservations" (39.8%), "unwillingly" (12.1%), or "without much

feeling” (12.1%). These two questions had different uses. The first question represents the respondents’ overall attitude towards the reform proposal. The second question represents the respondents’ degree of acceptance of the reform proposal.

Pro-democracy rally participation. The respondents were asked if they had participated in the December 4th rally (yes = 7.8%) against the government’s reform proposal and whether they would participate in a pro-democracy protest in the future (employing a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = certainly not to 5 = certainly yes). The two questions are used as separate variables in the analysis.

Attitude towards the future of political reform. Furthermore, to understand the attitudes of citizens on the possible future of political reform, they were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = absolutely should not, 5 = absolutely should), whether they thought Hong Kong people should insist that the government’s Commission on Strategic Development: (1) set up a timetable for democratization (mean = 3.50, S.D. = 1.00), and (2) institutionalize direct elections in 2012 (mean = 3.41, S.D. = 1.01).

Measurement and Degree of Ambivalence

Public opinion researchers have developed different ways to measure ambivalence. Zaller and Feldman (1992), for example, used open-ended questions to solicit the respondents’ “considerations” on political issues. They then measured ambivalence in terms of whether the respondents gave both positive and negative considerations when answering the question. This method, however, is highly dependent upon the degree to which the respondents can and are willing to provide the considerations on the spot. It is therefore heavily influenced by how talkative individuals are in the survey situation.

Another measuring method, originally developed by Kaplan (1972), is to explicitly ask the respondents to separate their positive and negative thoughts/feelings, and then ask them two separate questions (or sets of questions): one focusing on the degree to which the respondents feel or think positively about an object, and the other

focusing on the degree to which they feel or think negatively about the object (e.g., Craig, Martinez and Kane, 2005). However, it seems somewhat contrived and artificial to explicitly ask the respondents to consider “only positive” or “only negative” feelings/thoughts. In the context of a Cantonese-based telephone survey in Hong Kong, it was also thought that the respondents would find the requirement confusing and the questions difficult to understand.

Yet another method is to ask the respondents a set of questions about an object or issue. Among the questions some register positive feelings and thoughts, while others register negative feelings and thoughts. For example, Meffert, Guge, and Lodge (2004) measured people’s ambivalence towards political candidates by looking at how they responded to 30 survey items about the perceived personality traits of the candidates. Half of the 30 items measured positive traits and the other half measured negative traits. The average of the answers to the 15 positive traits thus represented the degree of a respondent’s positive thoughts towards the candidates, and the average of the answers to the 15 negative traits represents the degree of the respondent’s feelings of negativity. In this case, the respondents’ positive and negative thoughts were measured separately without the respondents being explicitly asked to separate the two sentiments.

This study adopts a method similar to the approach of Meffert, Guge, and Lodge (2004). The questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = highly reasonable, 5 = highly unreasonable), whether or not they thought that three arguments opposing the government’s political reform proposal are reasonable: (1) the pace of democratization in the government’s reform proposal is too slow, (2) rejecting the government’s proposal will force the government to address the citizens’ calls for democracy, and (3) the government’s proposal is a bird cage — if it is accepted, the pace of democratization will slow down. The respondents were then asked to indicate, using the same scale, the degree to which they thought the following three arguments supporting the government’s political reform proposal were reasonable or unreasonable: (1) if the Legislative Council (Legco) accepted the government’s proposal, the central government would have greater trust in the Hong Kong people, (2)

given the central government's attitude, the SAR government could not in fact have put forward a more progressive reform proposal, and (3) rejecting the government's proposal will slow down the pace of democratization.

Table 1 summarizes the answers to these items. With the six items, we may be able to determine the extent to which Hong Kong people find at least some arguments for *and* some arguments against the government's political reform proposal reasonable. By combining and cross tabulating the items, we found that 10.0% of the respondents regarded at least one of the three oppositional arguments as reasonable and none of the three supportive arguments reasonable, and that 32.7% of the respondents felt that at least one supportive argument was reasonable and none of the oppositional arguments reasonable. In addition, 21.3% of the respondents found none of the six arguments reasonable. Most importantly, 36.0% of the respondents found at least one supportive argument and at least one oppositional argument to be reasonable.

What the numbers show is that more than one-third of our respondents had at least some conflicting considerations towards the government's political reform proposal. Taking out the 21.3% of respondents who found none of the six reasons offered in the survey to be persuasive, the percentage of respondents with mixed considerations rose to 45.8%. In conceptual terms, these respondents were experiencing a certain degree of objective ambivalence. Moreover, it should be noted that our survey has included only a limited number of "reasons" (although these reasons would have been among the most prominent ones brought forward in the public discourse at the time). It is possible that those who agreed with none of the three oppositional (or supportive) arguments in the survey would find persuasive an argument that has not been included. Therefore, the actual percentage of Hong Kong citizens who were experiencing at least a certain degree of objective ambivalence could only have been higher. Our findings thus suggest that a significant degree of objective ambivalence indeed existed among the Hong Kong population on the issue of political reform.

A factor analysis shows that answers to the six items did form

Table 1 The respondents' agreement with arguments for and against the government's reform proposal

	Reasonable	Not reasonable	Mean
<i>Arguments opposing the proposal</i>			
The pace of democratization in the proposal is too slow.	26.0%	25.3%	2.99
Rejecting the proposal will force the government to address the citizens' calls for democracy.	22.8%	39.8%	2.69
The proposal is a bird cage — if it is accepted, the pace of democratization will slow down.	26.1%	39.8%	2.77
<i>Arguments supporting the proposal</i>			
If the Legco accepted the proposal, the central government would have greater trust in the Hong Kong people.	42.0%	20.8%	3.33
Given the central government's attitude, the SAR government could not in fact have put forward a more progressive reform proposal.	46.0%	20.0%	3.42
Rejecting the proposal will slow down the pace of democratization.	29.8%	30.0%	3.01
(n = 600)			

Note: The remaining respondents chose the neutral category, "don't know," or gave no valid answer to the question.

two distinctive factors, one constituted by agreement with the three oppositional arguments and the other constituted by agreement with the three supporting arguments. Positivity and negativity towards the reform proposal were therefore calculated by averaging the answers to the positive and negative arguments, respectively. Consistent with the idea that positive and negative thoughts can be separated, the positivity and negativity scores were not significantly related to each other at all ($r = -.00$). In other words, whether a person finds the

reasons supporting the government proposal to be persuasive has no relationship with whether the person finds the oppositional arguments to be persuasive. This finding of the separability of positive and negative thoughts/feelings is consistent with past research on the concept of ambivalence (Kaplan, 1972; Cacioppo and Berntson, 1994).

Besides the holding of considerations, the survey also asked the respondents to indicate the degree to which they thought that a series of actors should be held responsible for the failure of the government's political reform bill. The actors included: (1) the SAR government, (2) the central government, (3) pro-government politicians, (4) business leaders, (5) the democrats, and (6) participants in the December 4th rally. Answers were recorded on a 0-to-10 scale, with 0 representing not responsible at all and 10 representing highly responsible.

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive results. Based on the mean scores, the results show that the respondents basically found all of the actors to be responsible (all of the mean scores were 5 or above). A factor analysis shows that the answers to the first four items formed one factor. The answers to the last two items formed another. Hence, we averaged the answers to the first four items to form an index of the government's responsibility, and the answers to the last two items to form an index of the democrats' responsibility. Again, although public discourse often pitted the government and conservatives against the democrats and their supporters, the citizens' evaluations of the two groups of actors were separable: the two indices did not significantly correlate ($r = -.07$, $p > .10$). Moreover, a significant number of respondents found both groups of actors to be responsible. When the two indices were split at the mid-point, we found that 34.0% of the respondents had indicated that they considered both sides to be responsible for the scuttling of the government's political reform bill.

Based upon these results, two indices of objective ambivalence, labelled hereafter consideration ambivalence and responsibility ambivalence respectively, were calculated following Priester and Petty's (1996) gradual threshold model.⁴ Consideration ambivalence refers to the extent to which people hold both positive and negative

Table 2 The respondents' assessment of the responsibility of various actors

	Mean	(n)
SAR government	5.82	(561)
Central government	5.82	(546)
Pro-government politicians	5.39	(538)
Business leaders	5.00	(534)
Democrats	6.56	(551)
Participants in the December 4th rally	5.41	(542)

considerations regarding the issue. Responsibility ambivalence refers to the extent to which people hold both the government/conservatives and the democrats responsible for the failure of the political reform bill.

Thus far we have only discussed objective ambivalence. What about the subjective feeling of conflicts and indecision? In the survey, we measured subjective ambivalence using a single question: "Some citizens think that, on the issue of political reform, some strong arguments have been raised by both the supporting and opposing sides; therefore, it is difficult to judge who is right and who is wrong on the issue. Do you share the same feelings?"

Only 21.7% of the respondents reported "not at all," whereas 27.7% reported "a little bit," 33.3% reported "to a certain degree," and 10.0% reported "very strongly" (the others provided no valid answers or gave "don't know" as an answer). In other words, the vast majority of Hong Kong citizens have experienced at least some degree of subjective ambivalence on the issue of political reform.

Predictors and Consequences of Ambivalence

We have established that many Hong Kong citizens did experience at least a certain degree of objective as well as subjective ambivalence on the debate surrounding the government's political reform

proposal in 2005. But what factors predict ambivalence? What is the relationship between objective and subjective ambivalence? What are the consequences of having mixed thoughts?

We tackled these questions by employing a multiple regression analysis. We first examined the predictors of ambivalence. With regard to the regression on objective ambivalence, the independent variables included four demographic variables, the three measures of political efficacy, concern with political reform, attention to media, and interpersonal political discussions. With regard to the regression on subjective ambivalence, the two indices of objective ambivalence were also included as independent variables because objective ambivalence can be the cause of subjective ambivalence (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2005).

Table 3 summarizes the results. It can be immediately noted that objective and subjective ambivalence are predicted by different factors. The attitudinal variables do not seem to predict objective ambivalence, with the exception of a weak but significant positive relationship between collective efficacy and consideration ambivalence. Instead, females and young people have higher levels of both consideration and responsibility ambivalence. In addition, the frequency of interpersonal political discussion has a positive relationship with consideration ambivalence. This suggests that interpersonal discussions are a way for people to become acquainted with the arguments and reasons advanced by those on different sides of the issue.

Different from objective ambivalence, subjective ambivalence has no significant relationship with demographic variables at all. Instead, people with lower levels of internal efficacy (i.e., people who are less confident in their own ability to understand politics and public affairs) are more likely to experience subjective ambivalence on the issue. Most interestingly, attention to media relates positively to subjective ambivalence. One plausible explanation for this is that a significant section of the Hong Kong news media may have followed the norms of objectivity and neutrality and portrayed both sides of the debate as having some legitimate arguments and concerns. This kind of balanced coverage may give rise to a feeling of ambivalence.⁵

Table 3 Predictors of objective and subjective ambivalence

	Dependent variable: Ambivalence		
	Consideration	Responsibility	Subjective
Sex	.10*	.13**	.04
Age	-.13**	-.33***	.02
Education	-.07	-.09	-.02
Income	-.06	-.01	-.04
Internal efficacy	-.05	-.05	-.10*
Collective efficacy	.09*	.07	.06
External efficacy	-.02	-.02	.01
Concern with political reform	-.08	-.08	.03
Attention to media	-.01	-.00	.15**
Political discussions	.10*	.01	-.05
Ambivalence			
Consideration	—	—	.11*
Responsibility	—	—	.18***
Adjusted R ²	7.7%***	13.4%***	7.4%***
n	600	600	600

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Notes: The entries are standardized regression coefficients.

Missing values were replaced by means in multiple regression.

Not surprisingly, both consideration and responsibility ambivalence are significantly and positively related to subjective ambivalence. However, the correlations are not overwhelmingly strong, which is consistent with Holbrook and Krosnick's (2005) finding. In fact, the regression model as a whole can explain less than 10% of the variance in subjective ambivalence. Certainly, a major cause of subjective ambivalence — conflicts between core beliefs and values — is not examined in the present study. Future work is needed to further examine this and other possible causes of ambivalence.

Let us turn to the analysis of the consequences of ambivalence. Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses on how ambivalence relates to overall attitudes toward the government's proposal. The first column of the table shows that the government's

proposal was supported by people with comparatively lower levels of collective efficacy and higher levels of external efficacy. In addition, there is a significant negative relationship between overall support for the proposal and consideration ambivalence. However, this is only a by-product of the distribution of opinions on the issue of democratic reform. To give a hypothetical example, when there are only two types of people, with one type holding purely positive attitudes towards an object and the other holding mixed attitudes towards an object, ambivalence would appear to relate negatively to attitudes towards that object. Similarly, on the issue of the government's reform proposal, there were more Hong Kong people who supported the proposal than opposed it. This means that, given the current data, it can be concluded that people who held non-ambivalent attitudes were more likely to be one-sidedly for than one-sidedly against the government proposal. Hence, the more ambivalent an individual was, the less likely he or she would have been to support the government's proposal.

Of course, putting aside the distribution of opinions on an existing issue, previous research has suggested that ambivalence should mainly affect not the direction but the extremity of the attitude. Extremity simply refers to the distance between one's opinion and neutrality. People who were "strongly opposed" to the reform proposal were more extreme than people who were simply "opposed" to the proposal, who in turn were "more extreme" than people who held a neutral opinion. Therefore, the four-point scaled variable for overall support was turned into a three-point scaled variable indicating extremity: 3 = "strongly oppose" or "strongly support" the government's proposal, 2 = "oppose" or "support" the government's proposal, 1 = "don't know," "don't remember," and no answer. A regression analysis was then conducted. The second column of Table 4 shows that people with comparatively higher levels of education, higher levels of media attention, and a higher frequency of engagement in interpersonal discussions had a more extreme attitude towards this issue. In addition, consistent with H1 and H2, all three variables of ambivalence have a negative coefficient in the model. Although only consideration ambivalence is significant, it should be

Table 4 Ambivalence and attitudes towards the government's proposal

	Attitude towards the proposal	Extremity with regard to the proposal	Degree of acceptance
Sex	-.00	.01	.04
Age	-.04	-.01	.07
Education	.01	.12*	-.03
Income	.05	-.04	-.04
Internal efficacy	-.02	.04	.25***
Collective efficacy	-.23***	.03	-.14*
External efficacy	.34***	-.01	.27***
Concern with political reform	.08	.03	.11
Attention to media	-.09	.14*	-.04
Political discussions	.08	.15**	-.12
Ambivalence			
Consideration	-.14**	-.18***	-.15*
Responsibility	.01	-.08	-.14*
Subjective	.00	-.05	-.01
Adjusted R ²	14.3%***	16.6%***	19.2%***
n	600	600	254

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Notes: The entries are standardized regression coefficients.

Missing values were replaced by means in multiple regression.

noted that all three variables of ambivalence had significant negative coefficients in the model when the other two measures of ambivalence were excluded. The relationship between extremity and ambivalence is quite robust.

The last column of Table 4 shows the results on the meaning of Hong Kong people accepting the government's proposal. The original question was used as a three-point scaled variable: 3 = accept gladly, 2 = accept with reservations, 1 = accept unwillingly.⁶ This is a measure of degree of acceptance, and those with mixed feelings could be expected to have accepted the proposal with more reservations

and reluctance than those with clear-cut feelings. The results showed that those with comparatively higher levels of internal and external efficacy were more likely than others to have happily accepted the proposal. People with higher levels of collective efficacy, however, accepted the proposal more reluctantly than those with lower levels of collective efficiency. At the same time, both consideration and responsibility ambivalence relate significantly and negatively to degree of acceptance. In other words, objective ambivalence did lead to a reluctance to accept the government's proposal, or to reservations about doing so. On the whole, Table 4 gives support to H1. But H2 is supported to a much lesser extent.

Is it true, then, that ambivalence will also lead to a lower likelihood of participation and to the weakening of the attitude-behaviour linkage? Table 5 reports the results of the regression analysis on the question. Participation in the December 4th rally in 2005 is explained by higher levels of internal efficacy. In addition, people who paid more attention to the news media on the issue were also more likely to have participated. Not surprisingly, protest participation was closely related to negative attitude towards the government's proposal.

The findings on the impact of ambivalence are mixed and intriguing. On the one hand, the evidence suggests that ambivalence could weaken the impact of attitude on behaviour. The interaction term between subjective ambivalence and attitude towards the proposal is positive in sign. This means that the negative relationship between attitude towards the government's proposal and protest participation was weaker among people who experienced subjective ambivalence. Although the coefficient is not statistically significant in Table 5, it would approach statistical significance ($p < .08$) if the other two interaction variables were removed from the model (thus reducing the problem of multicollinearity in the model). In other words, the finding, although not robust statistically, is consistent with the idea underlying H6; that is, subjective ambivalence weakens the ability of an attitude to predict behaviour.

On the other hand, Table 5 shows that consideration ambivalence itself had a positive relationship with participation in the December 4th rally. This finding contrasts with research findings in the West

Table 5 Ambivalence and participation in pro-democracy rallies

	Participated in the December 4th rally	Will participate in future rallies
Sex	-.64	-.02
Age	-.22	-.07
Education	-.06	.03
Income	.10	.02
Internal efficacy	.50*	.05
Collective efficacy	.21	.16***
External efficacy	.34	.00
Concern with political reform	.22	.00
Attention to media	.80**	.14**
Political discussions	.39	.10*
Attitude towards the proposal	-1.88***	-.27***
Ambivalence		
Consideration	.10**	.16***
Responsibility	.02	.08
Subjective	-.03	-.02
Interaction: Attitude ×		
Consideration ambivalence	.02	.03
Responsibility ambivalence	.02	.10*
Subjective ambivalence	.45	-.01
Adjusted R ²	—	22.1%***
Model χ^2	120.51***	—
Pseudo-R ²	38.2%	—
n	543	600

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Notes: The entries in the first column are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients. The entries in the second column are standardized regression coefficients.

Missing values were replaced by means in multiple regression.

on the negative impact of ambivalence on political participation (e.g., Mutz, 2002; Nir, 2005). Subjective ambivalence also did not significantly influence participation in the rally. Therefore, contrary to the expectations in H3 and H4, ambivalence did not prevent Hong Kong citizens from participating in the pro-democracy rally. Objective ambivalence even seems to have prompted greater participation.

The findings are similar with regard to the intention to participate in future pro-democracy rallies. Attention to news media coverage of the issue of political reform, the frequency of interpersonal political discussions, and collective efficacy were positively related to the intention to participate in future rallies.⁷ People who did not support the government reform proposal in 2005 also reported higher levels of intention to act. However, this negative relationship between the attitude towards the political reform proposal and the intention to act was weaker among people with higher levels of responsibility ambivalence. This is documented by the positive coefficient of the interaction term between responsibility ambivalence and the attitude towards the government's proposal. At the same time, consideration ambivalence itself had a significant and positive regression coefficient. Again, ambivalence seems to have weakened the behavioural impact of an attitude, but, by itself, it also seems to have encouraged participation in collective political actions.

Before further explaining this surprising relationship, to complete the analysis Table 6 shows the results on the factors explaining Hong Kong people's attitudes on how political reforms should proceed. The dependent variables were whether the respondents thought that the Hong Kong people should insist on the government setting up a timetable for democratization and holding direct elections for the Chief Executive in 2012. Collective efficacy had a consistently significant and positive impact on insistence. Interpersonal political discussion was positively related to insisting on a timetable, while people with lower levels of education were more insistent on holding direct elections in 2012.

As expected, the attitude towards the government's reform proposal was strongly related to an insistence on both a timetable and direct elections in 2012. But the positive coefficients obtained

Table 6 Ambivalence and attitude towards the political reform process

	Insist on timetable	Insist on direct elections in 2012
Sex	-.04	-.02
Age	.01	-.04
Education	.03	-.11*
Income	-.05	.07
Internal efficacy	-.00	-.05
Collective efficacy	.12**	.15***
External efficacy	.04	.02
Concern with political reform	.00	-.08
Attention to media	-.06	.02
Political discussions	.12**	.07
Attitude towards the proposal	-.32***	-.27***
Ambivalence		
Consideration	.16***	.14**
Responsibility	.16***	.10*
Subjective	.02	.08*
Interaction: Attitude ×		
Consideration ambivalence	.07	.09*
Responsibility ambivalence	.04	.04
Subjective ambivalence	.01	.05
Adjusted R ²	24.5%***	24.1%***
n	600	600

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Notes: The entries are standardized regression coefficients.

Missing values were replaced by means in multiple regression.

by the interaction term between consideration ambivalence and the attitude towards the reform proposal mean that the negative relationship between the attitude towards the reform proposal and the dependent variables was weaker among people with higher levels of consideration ambivalence.⁸ Nevertheless, ambivalence itself related positively to the two variables, and consideration ambivalence emerged

as the most significant predictor. Responsibility ambivalence also related significantly with both dependent variables, while subjective ambivalence related significantly to an insistence on holding direct elections in 2012. Therefore, while holding conflicting considerations and mixed feelings about the government's reform proposal caused people's opinions on the proposal itself to become less extreme and weakened the linkage between their attitude towards the government's proposal and their attitude towards the future process of the reform, it did not cause people to feel confused about the proper future process of political reform.

How are we to understand the positive impact of ambivalence on participation and insistence on democratic progress? To better understand the results, we conducted a further analysis by breaking down the consideration ambivalence measure into its three original components: (1) agreement with arguments supporting the political reform bill, (2) agreement with arguments opposing the political reform bill, and (3) polarity between the first two components. We re-conducted the regression analyses in Tables 5 and 6 by adding these three variables into the model, while removing the ambivalence measures and the interaction terms between ambivalence and attitude towards the political reform proposal. The findings (not shown here) show that agreement with arguments against the reform proposal was positively and strongly related to the four dependent variables in Tables 5 and 6, even when controlling for overall attitude towards the reform proposal and other variables. However, after controlling for overall attitude towards the reform proposal, agreeing with arguments for the reform proposal did not stop people from participating in rallies or make them less insistent on two major aspects of the future process of democratic reform in Hong Kong. Polarity, meanwhile, also had a limited relationship with the variables. It only had a significant negative impact on participation in the December 4th rally.

These findings helped us to interpret the findings in Tables 5 and 6. When researchers argue that ambivalence should lower participation, the basic expectation is that the effects of positive and negative thoughts should more or less cancel out each other, and the lack of polarity between the negative and positive thoughts should

undermine participation. But in the case of democratic reform in Hong Kong, only agreement with arguments opposing the political reform bill had a consistently significant impact on the dependent variables. It thus contributed to the positive effect of consideration ambivalence shown in Tables 5 and 6. Such findings raise important questions on how we should study and understand the impact of ambivalence in public opinion.

Discussion

In sum, our analysis shows that a significant proportion of Hong Kong people were indeed ambivalent about the government's political reform proposal in 2005. At least one-third of our respondents had both positive and negative considerations towards the proposal, and more than 40% of our respondents indicated that they found it at least "to a certain degree" difficult to judge who was right and who was wrong. By contrast, only about 20% of our respondents indicated that they had no such feeling at all.

It is our contention that ambivalence is more the rule than the exception in public opinion. Ambivalence is bound to result when competing values co-exist, proposed solutions appear to be both functional and dysfunctional, and when people who share the same goal differ in their preference for strategies and tactics. On the specific case of the political reform bill in 2005, for example, opinion ambivalence may have been very much a result of differences in assessments of strategies. To many citizens who supported further and a faster pace of democratization, the reform proposal might have seemed far from ideal, but they may have felt that rejecting the proposal would further delayed the progress of democratization. This may explain why opinion polls showed that a majority supported direct elections in 2012 and, at the same time, a majority also supported the much more conservative reform proposal.

As stated at the beginning of the paper, it is our contention that ambivalence is not necessarily an undesirable phenomenon. Although ambivalence is often associated with confusion and a lack of information, the analysis in this paper shows that ambivalence can

actually be positively related to participation in political communication through interpersonal discussions and the consumption of news delivered by the media. Having mixed thoughts, therefore, can well be related to people's willingness to think and talk about the issue in question. This is partly the result of the contact that people have with the information environment. Ambivalence can be very far from being a sign of a lack of interest in and concern with public affairs.

There is also no indication that education is strongly and consistently related to ambivalence. Although better educated people should be endowed with better cognitive skills, they do not necessarily have fewer mixed considerations or experience lower levels of internal conflict. In fact, past research in the West has shown that education or political sophistication can be positively related to ambivalence on some specific objects and issues (Albertson et al., 2005; McGraw and Bartels, 2005). Ambivalence is not necessarily the lack of cognitive ability to differentiate between right and wrong. On the contrary, the ability to recognize the reasons behind the positions taken by both sides may be regarded as one indication of a person's cognitive skills.

As people felt ambivalent towards the government's political reform proposal, they became less likely to hold an extreme overall attitude towards it. Some of them might even have decided to give "don't know" as their answer to what they thought about it. In fact, among the respondents who gave "don't know" as their overall attitude towards the reform proposal, 48.5% reported having the subjective feeling of ambivalence "to a certain extent" or "very strongly," 54.9% agreed with at least one of the three supportive reasons included in the survey, and 40.9% agreed with at least one of the three opposing reasons included in the survey. Therefore, choosing "don't know" does not mean that respondents did not know anything.

The above results imply that ambivalence can reduce polarization in public opinion. The media discourse may have portrayed a high degree of polarization between the government on the one hand, and the democrats and their supporters on the other. But our findings show that people's opinions are not one-sided and extreme. There can be

agreement on the validity of specific arguments between people who have different overall attitudes towards democratic reform.

Nevertheless, the most interesting finding in this study is that ambivalence is no obstacle to political participation. Although our analysis has shown that ambivalence can reduce the strength of the linkage between attitudes and behaviour, ambivalence by itself seems to have prompted participation and to have led to a higher likelihood to be insistent on how political reform should proceed. This goes against the common finding of a negative relationship between ambivalence and participation in the US (e.g., Mutz, 2002; Nir, 2005). A further analysis showed that only one of the three components in the ambivalence measure, that is, agreement with the reasons for opposing the government's reform bill, contributed to the effect of ambivalence on participation and to insistence on a faster pace of democratization. The other two components did not have a significant effect on the dependent variables.

One way to understand this latter finding is to put it into context. Rather than being asked to choose between two candidates or two policy proposals, Hong Kong citizens were faced with the question of whether or not to accept the reform proposal put forward by the Hong Kong government. The citizens could not make binding decisions through voting. Instead, people opposed to the proposal could only voice their views through non-institutionalized forms of collective action. In this situation, people engaged in activities against the proposal might know or even partially agree with some of the reasons given by the other side, but might have felt that those in power would not listen to them. That is, people might have known what considerations the government had, and they might even have agreed with some of those considerations, but thought that the power holders were not aware of what considerations the pro-democracy citizens had. Participating in a protest thus became one way for people to express their concerns. It was mainly an attempt to force the power holders to listen. To the extent that this is true, people would have engaged in the protest as long as they had reasons to oppose the reform proposal. Whether or not they recognized the validity of some of the rationales behind the reform proposal was unimportant.

The validity of this explanation needs to be further examined. But if it is valid, it will have important implications for the study of ambivalence. This is because it indicates that the consequences of ambivalence on participation will depend on the nature and characteristics of the issue and the participatory activities concerned.

But regardless of the explanation for the positive relationship between ambivalence and participation in the December 4th pro-democracy rally, the findings show that the participants in the recent wave of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong were not blind to the reasons put forward by the other side in the debate. Contrary to the belief of some Chinese government leaders and conservative politicians in Hong Kong, the demonstrators were not simple-minded people who were being manipulated by the democrats. The demonstrators understood that calling for a faster pace of democratization raises some legitimate concerns. As the debates surrounding democratic reform in Hong Kong became heated, many Hong Kong citizens began to search for information in the media and process this information, and to engage in interpersonal communication. Through such ways, they came to learn of the pros and cons of an issue. But the fact that there were pros and cons did not prevent those committed to the general goal of democratization from actively supporting the pro-democracy movement. In any case, it seems clear that the decision to participate in the December 4th pro-democracy rally, and in such rallies in general, cannot simply be dismissed as an emotional outburst. Rather, it was and is based on an understanding of the pros *and* cons of democratization in Hong Kong.

Much research remains to be done if we want to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of ambivalence and its manifestation in public opinion about democratic reform in Hong Kong. This study, for example, contains only a rudimentary examination of the causes of ambivalence. While there are indications that the characteristics of people's information environment is important, future studies should go further and examine such issues as how the heterogeneity of people's social networks and how perceptions of media bias relate to ambivalence. Value conflicts,

widely recognized as an important cause of ambivalence, should also be studied.

Yet the present study does have important implications for the process of democratization in Hong Kong. First, the demonstration of ambivalence in the opinions of Hong Kong people shows that Hong Kong people are indeed capable of reasoning and recognizing the complexities of social and political matters. Many Hong Kong people can recognize reasons when they hear them, even when the reasons are in opposition to their own attitudes. This is, of course, not to suggest that public opinion in Hong Kong is perfectly rational. Rather, it is to argue that there are “elements of reason” (Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin, 2000) in people’s opinions. If a certain degree of reasoning ability is a prerequisite for democracy to function properly, the Hong Kong public certainly meets this requirement.

The democrats also need to acknowledge that their supporters are not going to give them unqualified support on the issue of democratization. The democrats need to realize that their supporters do acknowledge the concerns and reasons raised by the other side. They may also have strategic concerns about whether an overly radical approach will only backfire. Hence, a highly confrontational and “democracy at all costs” approach may not resonate with too many Hong Kong citizens. When the general issue of democratization turns into a debate over a specific policy proposal, the democrats will need to be even more careful. Many Hong Kong people do support a faster pace of democratization. But such support at the general level does not directly translate into support for a specific line of concrete action. When specific policy plans are concerned, citizens’ considerations and feelings can be particularly mixed.

But by the same token, the Hong Kong and Chinese government should also recognize that Hong Kong citizens’ support for, or at least lack of opposition to, a specific government reform proposal does not equate to a lower degree of insistence on democratization. On the contrary, when a person acknowledges the reasons and concerns of the other side, that person may expect that the other side will in turn acknowledge his reasons and concerns. Ambivalence on the part of the Hong Kong public does not lessen the need for the Chinese and

Hong Kong government to directly address the Hong Kong people's quest for democracy.

Notes

1. Nevertheless, McGraw and Bartels (2005) have emphasized that ambivalence can also cause people to act in ways that are in accordance with the ideal of democratic citizenship. In their own study, they found that ambivalence leads to a search for information. Meffert, Guge, and Lodge (2004) showed that ambivalence is positively related to accuracy of political judgement. However, Holbrook and Krosnick (2005) have provided results that contradict the findings of other studies. They found that objective ambivalence leads to an increased likelihood for activism, while subjective ambivalence leads to a decreased likelihood to search for information.
2. People may understand the relationship between stability and democratization in different ways. Some may worry that there may be a rise in populism following democratization in Hong Kong, others may worry about the negative consequences of a direct confrontation with China, and so on.
3. The AAPOR formula 6 refers to the minimum response rate. It includes in the denominator all cases of "unknown eligibility." In the context of the present telephone survey, cases of "unknown eligibility" include "no one answering the phone," "hung up immediately," and "no target respondents" ("no target respondents" indicates unknown eligibility because this could have been a lie told by the person who answered the phone in order to avoid an interview). The result was therefore a much smaller response rate than that obtained following the AAPOR formula 1.

The sample had the following characteristics: 53.3% were female, 17.0% had a university degree, 21.7% had a monthly household income lower than HK\$10,000, 31.6% had a monthly household income of between HK\$10,000 and HK\$20,000, 30.9% were

aged 30 or below, and 22.3% were aged above 50. According to the 2006 Population By-census, 52.3% of the Hong Kong population were female. About 15.4% had a university degree, while 27.9% of Hong Kong households had a monthly income lower than HK\$10,000 and 27.8% had a monthly income of between HK\$10,000 and HK\$19,999 (Census and Statistics Department, 2007:24, 42, 62). Also according to government statistics, by the end of 2004, among people aged between 18 and 70, about 24.2% were aged 30 or below and 25.8% aged above 50 (statistics available online at <http://www.info.gov.hk>). The sample was therefore somewhat better educated, younger, and had higher household income than the general population. But the discrepancies were generally very small; thus, no weighting was applied to the sample.

4. A simpler intensity minus polarization formula is also widely used (Thompson et al., 1995). However, Priester and Petty (1996) examined different ways to calculate ambivalence scores and found that measures of objective ambivalence derived from a gradual threshold model can best predict subjective ambivalence. The formula is as follows:

If negativity (N) > positivity (P):

$$\text{Ambivalence} = (5 \times (P + 1)^{0.4}) - ((N + 1)^{(1/(P + 1))})$$

If negativity (N) < positivity (P):

$$\text{Ambivalence} = (5 \times (N + 1)^{0.4}) - ((P + 1)^{(1/(N + 1))})$$

5. While individual newspapers may have provided biased coverage of the issue, in the past few years other newspapers and broadcast media have largely adopted the conventional “neutral, objective, and balanced” approach to the issue of democratic reform in Hong Kong (see Lee and Lin, 2006, for a study on the rhetoric of objectivity in newspaper editorials on democratic reform).
6. Those who accepted the government’s proposal without much feeling were not included in the analysis because it is conceptually unclear how these people should be placed onto the scale used here. But a further analysis showed that, when these

people were grouped with people who accepted the proposal “with reservations,” the findings were basically the same.

7. The importance of collective efficacy can also be seen in the study by Lee (2006).
8. On insistence on a timetable, the coefficient of the interaction between consideration ambivalence and the attitude towards the government’s reform proposal would become statistically significant ($\beta = .09$, $p < .02$) if the other two interaction terms were removed (thus reducing the problem of multicollinearity).

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Taking Both Sides into Consideration

Ambivalence in Public Opinion on Political Reform in Hong Kong

Abstract

Many opinion polls have shown that the majority of Hong Kong citizens support the institutionalization of direct elections for the Chief Executive as soon as possible, but that there are also many citizens who support the SAR government's arguably conservative political reform bill introduced in late 2005. Does this represent a case of self-contradiction among the citizenry? Or should we adopt a different perspective to understand the complexities of public opinion? This study attempts to analyse and understand public opinions towards democratic reform through the concept of attitudinal ambivalence. In recent years, much research on political psychology has illustrated that many citizens hold simultaneously conflicting views and sentiments on complicated social and political matters. They may even experience subjective feelings of internal conflict. This study shows that many Hong Kong people also demonstrate objective and subjective ambivalence on the issue of democratic reform. Regarding the reform bill put forward in late 2005, many citizens did not one-sidedly support or oppose the reform bill, and some even felt that it was difficult to make an overall judgement on the matter. However, ambivalence is not the result of a lack of information and judgement. On the contrary, people who were more active in communicating politically were more likely to feel ambivalent. At the same time, an analysis of the data shows that ambivalence will reduce the extremeness of attitudes, as well as the impact of the relevant attitude on political behaviour. These findings are consistent with research in the US. Nevertheless, ambivalence did not reduce people's intentions to engage in political participation. In fact, those who had participated in pro-democracy demonstrations exhibited higher levels of ambivalence than non-participants. The implications of these findings are discussed.

是自相矛盾還是顧慮周全？

香港市民對政制改革的意見的兩難性

李立峰 陳韜文

(中文摘要)

在政制改革的問題上，雖然民意調查顯示大部分香港市民都支持盡快普選行政長官，但很多市民亦同時支持特區政府在二零零五年底提出的步伐頗為緩慢的政改方案。這是否顯示香港市民的意見自相矛盾？抑或我們應該從另外的角度去了解民意的複雜性？本文嘗試透過心理學中態度「兩難性」(attitudinal ambivalence)的概念，去理解和分析香港市民對政制改革的意見。近年，不少政治心理學研究指出很多市民在面對複雜的社會和政治議題時，會同時接納正反雙方的一些觀點，甚至在主觀感受上覺得模稜兩可。本研究顯示，不少香港市民在政改問題上的意見亦具有客觀和主觀兩難性的特徵：很多市民並非一面倒支持或反對政改方案，一些市民甚至感到對錯難分。不過，感到兩難並不是缺乏資訊和判斷力的後果。相反，愈積極參與政治傳播行為的市民感到兩難的機會愈高。同時，數據分析顯示，意見的「兩難性」會減弱有關意見的強烈程度，亦會減弱有關意見對政治行為的影響力。這些結果跟西方政治心理學研究的發現吻合。不過，跟西方研究不同的是，兩難性並沒有直接減低市民的政治參與意欲。相反，在政改方案爭議上愈感到兩難的市民，其參與遊行爭取民主的意欲愈高。本文對這些研究結果的理論意義以及其對香港政制發展過程的啟示分別作出討論。

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