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DEVELOPMENT, COLONIAL RULE, AND INTERGROUP
POLITICS IN A CHINESE VILLAGE IN HONG KONG*

by

Chan Lam-yan and Lau Siu-kai

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DEVELOPMENT, COLONIAL RULE, AND INTERGROUP POLITICS
IN A CHINESE VILLAGE IN HONG KONG

Political and economic changes in developing countries have the ineluctable consequence of incorporating the once more-or-less isolated villages into the national system. Politically speaking, what this means is that a growing number of villages have become 'encapsulated', to use the terminology of Bailey (1977: 144-155), within the larger, overarching political society, which is epitomized by the state. In general, the incorporation of villages into the national political system inevitably would mean the importation of outside resources into the political arena, and this would have the effect of restructuring political alignments in the villages so affected. Political resources in the form of political party affiliations (particularly in those one-party states), formal or personal relationships with government officials in development- and penetration-oriented administrations, connections with resource-rich personalities and organizations in the dominating cities (especially the capitals), and patron-client networks of various kinds, are of crucial importance in shaping the power structure in the villages. Economic dependency of these villages on the outside in turn reinforces this political dependency. Economic resources, needless to say, can easily be converted into resources for political uses; and it is not surprising to see that in some cases it is economics which prescribes the rules of the political game (Owusu 1970).

Despite the wide acknowledgment of political encapsulation of villages in Third World countries, the forms it takes and the effects thus engendered

vary substantially from case to case. The nature of the political penetration of the national system, the intentions of the political parties (mobilization or regulation/control), the preexisting power structure in the village concerned, the strategy of economic development adopted, the ethnic and occupational composition of the villagers, the capability of the state administration and a host of other factors are of relevance in shaping the political system at the village level.

In some places, traditional leaders have demonstrated a tenacious ability to survive or even to prosper through the exploitation of the new opportunities available (Markovitz 1977: 153-172; Miller 1968: 118-133; Skinner 1968: 134-136; Cole 1975: 189-191; Whitaker, Jr. 1970: 458-468; Kuan and Lau 1979; Bailey 1963: 133). They may make use of their leadership skills, wealth and political patronage to convert the newly-instituted electoral or representative system to their own advantage, or, by means of their higher educational achievements, monopolize the bureaucratic positions in the local and national administrations, or they can render support to the anti-colonial and independence movements in their countries and procure political favours afterwards. It is true that in some situations outsiders (notably party officials and government bureaucrats) succeed in weeding out the entrenched dominance of traditional leaders by appropriating the local leadership themselves (Bond 1976). However, even in such situations the political significance of the traditional leaders lingers on, though now by necessity in a more dormant and covert manner. In countries which proclaim the supremacy of socialist doctrines, like Tanzania, the 'revolutionary' government has found it essential to solicit the help

of the traditional leaders in legitimizing and implementing the programmes of rural development (Bienen 1967: 352-355).

The power of the traditional leaders does not, however, go unquestioned. New groups are forever emerging to pose a challenge, groups previously politically disadvantaged may have accumulated enough resources now to make a bid for power (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 15-154; Bailey 1977: 156-166), political power has to be based increasingly on the leaders' capacity to deliver (primarily material) goods to their constituents from the outside, leadership succession has grown more frequent, rules of political competition and struggle may fail to be institutionalized (Robinson 1975: 1-11 and 274-281), and factional politics may be the norm rather than power centralization (Gallin 1966, 1968). Political incorporation also means that changes in the larger national system would produce reverberations in village and local politics, and it is not uncommon to find that the village political arenas are deserted forever by many so that resources can be released and diverted to the pursuit of power and status outside of the village. All in all, political incorporation of villages and localities in the developing countries has led to a high level of political competition within these countries, and correspondingly, to an increased degree of politicization there. Under such conditions, political issues can be generalized fairly swiftly, and political conflict can be magnified both vertically and horizontally throughout the nation. This high level of politicization in many cases has created insurmountable problems which seriously hamper the efforts at socio-economic development in the countries concerned. A substantial

portion of the scarce resources of these countries has to be allocated to the resolution of conflicts, instead of to urgently-needed developmental projects.

Development: Hong Kong Style

In view of the general situation of intensified politics in other developing countries, the case of the British colony of Hong Kong is rather unique. Development, both planned and unplanned, in the rural areas of Hong Kong (called the New Territories) has so far proceeded in a smooth manner. Conflicts generated by the process are rare, open struggles and physical confrontations are rarer still. Even if they occur, they are contained or resolved by the Hong Kong government with relative ease. Paradoxically, the government involved in the process is a colonial government, and it is constrained in its action by a set of constitutional rules which were put into force at the end of the nineteenth century. These rules are unalterable short of a constitutional re-ordering of society which is out of the question given the current colonial status of Hong Kong. Formally and legally at least, the government is handicapped in its capacity to resolve conflicts arising from the process of rural development. It thus compares unfavourably with most other developing countries which claim the right, often supported by military might, to restructure the political game to their own advantage. What is more paradoxical in the Hong Kong case is that the government itself has played a key role in initiating the process of rural development in Hong Kong at a time when its administrative structure is least capable of doing so ; for example, when compared with many other Third World countries, the

Hong Kong government lacks the administrative, political or organizational means to penetrate the rural areas and mobilize or control the rural populace.

The solution to these paradoxes lies in the fact that the development goals of the Hong Kong government differ from those of most other developing countries. What it tries to do is rather specific and narrow in scope: to obtain land from the rural people so that it can be used to meet the housing needs and the need for industrial sites of the urban sector (Kuan and Lau 1980). There is no felt necessity to mobilize and educate the rural populace (as in other developing countries) so that they can participate effectively in the development process. What they have to do in the Hong Kong case is to surrender their land after compensation is made by the government and move elsewhere. Instead of mobilizing the rural populace to organize and expand the resource-generating capacity of the rural areas, rural development in Hong Kong means that rural areas have to be vacated by the resident villagers so that external agents and outsiders can move in to run the show without being encumbered by traditional entanglements. In short, rural development in Hong Kong is in essence the urbanization of the countryside.

In such a context, it is the government and outsiders who are in control of the resources coveted by the ruralites. The development plan of the government will more or less determine who will be the beneficiaries in the land speculation game, as land to be resumed for developmental purposes will rise in value. Hence, the government can utilize prior information

about the development plans to coopt those rural leaders who are willing to collaborate. Its withdrawal from the recalcitrants will not only constitute disincentive to them, but might also jeopardize the legitimacy of their leadership among their constituents who expect benefits from their leaders. Given the elitist nature of politics in rural Hong Kong (Kuan and Lau 1979), rural elites are thus manipulated by the government and they are prevented from mobilizing the masses against the government.

The manipulative skill exercised by the government can be vividly seen in its efforts to cope with a particular kind of political conflict which is closely related to the planned development process, namely, the conflict between the original inhabitants and the outsiders in the villages. Being a resource controller and resource allocator, the government is naturally sought after by different groups in the rural area. The peculiar phenomenon in rural Hong Kong is that its political and administrative institutions, primarily in the form of the District Officer System, were established in a pre-development era. This political arrangement has differentiated between two types of inhabitants in the New Territories of Hong Kong, and one of them has been granted special rights which are denied the other. Specifically, they are the pen-t'u-jen (the original inhabitants) and the outsiders. The former group is composed of those who lived in the New Territories before or in 1898 when the area was leased from China, and their descendants; while the outsiders are those who have moved into the New Territories after that date. It is apparent that such a differentiation is merely administrative. It may also be the result of

the colonial officials' perception of cultural reality and their zeal to preserve the traditional values and institutions of the colonial subjects (Pollis 1972; Means 1972). This differentiation is, however, made politically significant as a result of the bestowal of a series of special rights to the original inhabitants, among which the right of political representation is the most relevant in our study.¹ Since the Second World War, this right has been embodied in the Village Representative System, which allows the original inhabitants to elect their representatives, who then become the component units of the larger bodies of the District Rural Committees, and the Heung Yee Kuk (Rural Consultative Committee) at the top of the hierarchy. These political organs, though consultative and advisory in nature, afford the original inhabitants a means to communicate with and influence the policy of the government.

Before mid-1960s, when the New Territories were slightly affected by the planned development of the government, the possession of this right by the original inhabitants and its denial to the outsiders, were not politically significant as it did not give rise to inequitable distribution of resource between the two groups. As the government accelerated its development efforts after the mid-1960s, the right of political representation suddenly emerged to be of enormous import, as the exclusion of the outsiders and their leaders from the planning process meant the deprivation of their right to benefit from it. An administrative and cultural distinction between groups has thus taken on political charge, and the failure of the leaders of the original inhabitants to take into consideration and promote

the interests of the outsiders who live in the villages under their jurisdiction has created conflict between them, forcing the outsiders to seek means to represent themselves before the government.² On the part of the government, the maintenance of stability and peace in the rural area during the process of planned development is deemed to be of overriding importance. However, it is prevented by the colonial straitjacket from granting formal representation to the outsiders, even though it is sympathetic to their plight and is inclined to pacify them. What this means is that pragmatic rules have to be devised and accepted by both sides so that de facto political recognition is granted to the outsiders while preserving the formal colonial political/administrative appearance, and in fact this has been done.

The following case study will describe the interplay between development, intergroup politics, and conflict management by the colonial administration in a village in the New Territories. The village selected for this study is the So Kun Wat Village, and it is chosen because it has attributes which enable us to analyze the issues mentioned above in a delimited geographical setting. In the first place, both original inhabitants and outsiders can be found in the village, though the fact that the size of the population of outsiders surpasses that of the original inhabitants would make it untypical in the New Territories, as other villages are usually dominated numerically by original inhabitants. The numerical superiority of outsiders in the village, however, renders intergroup politics more evident and more amenable to observation. Secondly, as both the original inhabitants

and the outsiders are Hakkanese,³ the ethnic factor can be treated as largely inoperative here, while the political and administrative factors can be given more prominent attention. Thirdly, because of its proximity to Tsuen Wan, a developed industrial town, the villagers have experienced the impact of industrialization much earlier (since the 1950s) than other villages. Finally, the village's closeness to Tuen Mun, a planned new town currently in the early stage of development, and the inclusion of the village in its layout plan, would make it directly susceptible to the vicissitudes of the latest government policies. In general, the So Kun Wat Village offers an ideal opportunity to examine the interplay between planned development, intergroup politics, and conflict management by the government.

The So Kun Wat Village: Physical and Socioeconomic Profile

The So Kun Wat Village is an elongated village which lies in a small valley located about eighteen miles north of Kowloon (an urban area of Hong Kong), and on the side of the Castle Peak Bay. The high hills and the seashore are the natural boundaries which separate it physically from adjacent villages. The Tai Lam Chung Reservoir, constructed in the 1950s, is located to the northeast of the village. A rivulet connecting the reservoir and the seashore runs through the whole village. The Castle Peak Road, at the mouth of the village, links it up with Kowloon and the nearby towns - Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long.

The population of the village at present is estimated to be around 5,500, with about 560 household units. The average size of the family is

about ten persons. The population of the original inhabitants is believed to be 1,500, formed into 125 household units. The rest of the population in the village consists of outsiders, who account for the remaining 435 household units.

The original inhabitants are composed of three lineages with different surnames. The Lee's have 60 household units, the Chan's about 55, and the Cheng's only ten. They all speak the same kind of Hakka dialect, the origin of which is Tamshui, Kwangtung. The residences of the original inhabitants are located at the inner part of the village, which is a flat area. The outsiders are scattered among the outer parts of the village. Most of them reside along the hillsides, or near the seashore. A small shrine to the earth god under a big tree at the roadside marks the internal boundary between the two groups of people. It was found that no outsiders have ever been allowed to reside or bury their ancestors inside the original inhabitants' area.

The outsiders, some of whom have settled down in the village as early as 1949, consist of various groups coming from different regions in eastern Kwangtung. The dominant two are from Waiyang and Lufung, and the others are from Haifung, Teochiu, and Tungkwan. Like the original inhabitants, they are also Hakkas, though speaking (in general) slightly different dialects. The major surnames among them are Chu, Lau, Chung, Pang, Wong, and Law. The outsiders are a highly heterogeneous group, for they came from different places, and in different time periods.

As of now, the total area of arable land in the village is about 140

acres, which can be divided into Crown land and private land. Crown land refers to land owned by the Hong Kong government, whereas private land belongs to the ordinary people. Villagers who are cultivating Crown land have to be granted a permit of use by the District Office, and submit a small amount of tax at the end of each year. As such, they have the right to cultivate the land, but not sell it. Private land in the village is mainly occupied by the original inhabitants, whereas Crown land is used by outsiders. This difference in ownership patterns is in fact an outcome of the administrative policy of the government. When the New Territories Administration was established immediately after the lease of the area in 1898, a land survey was conducted, and local villagers were summoned to register their land with the government. Land registered at that time was recognized officially as private land, whereas all the rest of the land in the village became automatically Crown land owned by the government. Outsiders, who moved to the village at a later stage, have brought much of the hillside and fringeland into cultivation by their own labour. However, the ownership of this newly cultivated land still resides with the government. As a result, land occupied by outsiders is physically scattered and less fertile; on the other hand, land owned by the original inhabitants is concentrated in the level area, and is more arable.

In this physical and socioeconomic context, intergroup relations, and the two groups' relationship with the government, have undergone a series of changes. Underlying these changes are changes in the economic activities of the villagers, the influx of immigrants, the impact of industrialization and

urbanization, the planned development of the government, and the changes in the attitude and policy of the government toward intergroup politics. Succinctly put, the political development of the village since the British occupation of the New Territories in 1898 can be divided chronologically into four stages. 1898-1949 is the first period, in which the original inhabitants were the only residents in the village and their dominance was complete. The second period runs from 1950 to 1957, during which an influx of outsiders occurred. The third period is from 1958 to 1969, a period of relative stability and mutual accommodation between the two groups of Hakkas. The last period began in 1969, in which soaring land values and growing economic inequality between villagers, particularly between original inhabitants and outsiders, are by and large the result of the planned development of government and its policy of compensation. This period also witnessed an intensification of intergroup politics in the village, politics vis-a-vis the government by both groups, and the formulation and execution of pragmatic political rules on the part of the government to manage conflict.

Political Development in the Village: Four Stages

First Stage: 1898-1949 During this period, the village was the exclusive domain of the original inhabitants, whose three major lineages were the dominant political force in the area. Their ancestors were said to have moved in to the village from Kwangtung as early as the late eighteenth century. The population then was estimated to be about four to five hundred. The major economic activity was two-crop rice-farming, supplemented by the

growing of sweet potatoes in the winter, pig and poultry raising and fishing along the nearby seashore. The technology of farming was simple, and subsistence agriculture was the rule. The village was isolated from other parts of the New Territories due to inadequate transportation (the Castle Peak Road was not yet built). No villager had employment outside the community.

Like other villages in south China, leaders came from the ranks of village elders, local notables, and the gentry (who were extremely few in number) (Freedman 1966). Most of the time village leaders enjoyed high genealogical ranking in the lineages. Whenever disputes arose within or between lineages, village leaders would be requested to mediate and arbitrate, and the British colonial administration was rarely approached to help settle conflicts.

The New Territories Administration was fully aware of the influential power of the village leaders. In fact, government interference would stop at the entrance of the village provided that internal peace was maintained and land taxes were regularly paid. At the same time, the village leaders were informally recognized by the government as the representatives of the village, so that any issues which might affect the village were first discussed with them. Gradually, the village leaders tended to monopolize communication with the District Office (the political representative of the British government in the area).

After the end of the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong (1945), a village representative system was formally established by the government.

This system caused some changes in the leadership structure.⁴ As intermediaries between the village and the government, the village representatives were elected by the villagers or nominated by the District Officer (the latter path was afterwards phased out). In the So Kun Wat Village, two village representatives were separately elected by the Lee and Chan lineages. The Cheng lineage, because of its smallness, was placed under the representation of the two other lineages. Of the two representatives, the one from the Chan lineage was of lower rank, and was considered a 'vice-representative'. Under the new system, men with economic power or political skill not infrequently took over leadership functions from genealogical elders (cf. Baker 1968; Potter 1968).

The village representatives exerted enormous power over the villagers often because they possessed large amounts of land and high genealogical ranking. By serving as the formal channel of communication between the villagers and the District Office, the village representatives were further able to cement their political status within the village. This is because their service, now becoming more and more technical in nature, was indispensable whenever the villagers had to deal with the government. In this period, the most common issues for which villagers would need the help of the village representatives included: applications for a building permit from the District Office, registration of land transactions, proof of an individual's identity as a villager of good conduct (which was a prerequisite for employment in the army or the police force), and sponsorship for villagers who wanted to go abroad. Given

these facts it is not surprising that they were often addressed respectfully as heads of village (tsuen chang) by the villagers, a term which is often associated with administrative power in the Chinese terminology.

Though a consequence of colonial administration, the village representative system was able to maintain a life of its own and legitimize itself. Due to factors such as the illiteracy of the villagers, their ignorance of Cantonese and English, and the physical and sociocultural obstacles involved in approaching government officials, it was almost impossible for the villagers to bypass the channel of village representatives to reach the District Office. Colonial administrative policies has thus created a leadership stratum in a traditional Chinese village which was largely dependent on the colonial authorities for support and also (in some ways) for legitimacy.

Second Stage: 1950-1957 The influx of refugees from China to the village was the most significant event in this stage. The process of in-migration continued throughout the period and beyond. Being skilled vegetable farmers, these outsiders soon converted unused land on the hillsides and near the seashore into vegetable fields. In this period, vegetable farming was the main economic activity of the outsiders, together with raising pigs and poultry. By 1957, there were about seventy outsider households in the village. For the original inhabitants, the cultivation of two crops of rice every year was still their primary economic pursuit, providing their major source of income. It was not until the latter years in this period that employment opportunities in London or in the police and

army were opened up to supply another source of income. However, such opportunities were still comparatively rare and only a few original inhabitants had obtained such jobs. In general, both original inhabitants and outsiders relied overwhelmingly on agriculture for their livelihood.

Being a heterogeneous group, the outsiders were initially unorganized, either economically or politically. Typically, they sold their vegetable products to middlemen, who in turn sold them to urban consumers for a profit. As the arable land of the outsiders was created by their own efforts, they did not have to rely on the original inhabitants economically. The physical separation of the settlements of the two groups further reinforced the remote relationship between them. This relationship, in addition, was somewhat soured inasmuch as the original inhabitants maintained a sense of cultural superiority toward their fellow Hakkas. Not surprisingly, conflicts between the groups arose, frequently over the cows. The original inhabitants raised many cows and buffaloes to plough their paddy fields. Not uncommonly these animals would run into the vegetable fields of the outsiders or eat their vegetables. These incidents would inevitably provoke quarrels between the owner of the animal and the outsider farmer, and fighting would often ensue. Feuds involving whole lineages of the original inhabitants and large numbers of outsiders occasionally were triggered off by these minor incidents, resulting in heavy losses to both sides, particularly to the outsiders who were much less united.

The outsiders, nonetheless, were quick to realize the risk of any direct confrontations with the original inhabitants. They took the issues

to the elders, the village notables and the village representatives whenever they had trouble with the original inhabitants, and sought their help directly. In most cases, out of concern for peace and for demonstrating their effectiveness in the eyes of the government, these local leaders were willing to arbitrate and settle the disputes. In return, they would be rewarded with gifts by the outsiders either immediately or during the Chinese festivals.

The political dependence of the outsiders on the village representatives was further reinforced by their administrative dependence on them, as intermediaries with the District Office. The outsiders' newly cultivated plots, which were all on Crown land, needed to be registered with the District Office before a permit of use could be issued. On these occasions, the village representatives' service was indispensable, as only they were granted the official authority to give proof of identity and evidence of actual land use for the outsiders.

Since the village representatives were in a position to protect the outsiders against the incursions of the original inhabitants and to mediate between them and the District Office, they were highly respected by the outsiders. As a result, their bona fide political dominance became complete and unchallenged.

Third Stage: 1957-1969 The most significant events in this stage involve the shift in the economic activity of the original inhabitants to vegetable farming and the establishment of the Kun Lam Vegetable Co-operative Society. These developments complicated the leadership structure.

Attracted by the larger monetary returns from vegetable sales, increasing numbers of original inhabitants took up vegetable farming. This dramatic change in the economic activity of the original inhabitants was also facilitated by the establishment of the Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO) by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, which undertook to wholesale all vegetable products in the New Territories. Under the auspices of the VMO, a number of Vegetable Marketing Co-operative Societies were set up to help transport the farmer's vegetable products to the urban areas with the intention of insuring more profits to the farmers by eliminating the services of the middlemen. In 1957, a Vegetable Marketing Co-operative Society (VMCS) was formally set up in So Kun Wat Village, the proclaimed function of which was to transport vegetable produces from this district and some adjacent villages to the wholesale market in Kowloon. Named as the Kun Lam District VMCS, its membership included both the original inhabitants and the outsiders from the village.

The growing importance of the VMCS in this period was due to several factors. First, by 1965 rice cultivation had finally disappeared from the village, and vegetable cultivation was of unquestioned importance to the villagers. External employment, which was taken up mostly by the young among the original inhabitants, was still relatively insignificant. Second, the continual in-migration of outsiders and their higher birth-rate (as they were on average comparatively younger) served to swell the vegetable-growing population in the village. Since its establishment, the VMCS witnessed an expansion of membership. In the first year of its establishment, the total membership was eighty-six, twenty of whom were

original inhabitants, and sixty-six outsiders. The figure continued to rise as more original inhabitants shifted to vegetable farming and more outsiders moved in. By the early 1960s, the total membership was about 210, among whom two-fifths were original inhabitants and the rest were outsiders. The importance of the VMCS in the social life of So Kun Wat was also reflected in the fact that the annual election of its directors was a great event in the village. Throughout this stage, the average attendance rate in elections reached 85 percent of its total membership. Villagers who were not registered as members usually attended to share the excitement.

There were five persons in the VMCS's board of directors, among whom two were the chairman and the vice-chairman of the organization, these being elected from among the directors themselves. Typically, the number of original inhabitants who sat on the board was only one or two. This outcome was due to the numerical superiority of the outsider members in the VMCS, for it was common for each member to vote for candidates from his own group. The one or two original-inhabitant directors were in fact the village representatives themselves. The remaining four or three directorships were held among six or seven outsiders who occupied relatively more land than others and were known as rich farmers in the village.

The functions performed by the VMCS were of crucial import to the economic well-being of the villagers, and this accounted for the influence it exercised in the village. In addition to the transportation of vegetable products to Kowloon, it also provided a number of welfare services for its members. Under the supervision of the Agricultural and Fisheries Department,

it functioned to transmit its services and resources to improve the output of the farmers. These provisions included loans for development, veterinary services, information about technical innovations (e.g., mechanical cultivators, water sprinkler systems, new pesticides), and special funds earmarked for victims of disasters caused by typhoons or heavy rainfalls. By deducting 5 percent of the producers' sale returns as a service charge from its members, the VMCS was also able to accumulate a certain amount of capital which was used in the welfare scheme for local farmers, involving loans (which amounted to HK\$20,000 a year), recreational facilities for local villagers, and distribution of gifts to farmers at the end of each year.

The appearance of the Kun Lam District VMCS and the resources it controlled and allocated generated reverberations in the leadership structure of the So Kun Wat Village. In theory, it meant the emergence of another village-wide organization besides the village representation system. The fact that outsiders could exert political leverage in the new organization and manipulate it to their own advantage constituted a serious challenge to the established authority of the village representatives. Moreover, by the end of this period the population of outsiders in the village had already surpassed that of the original inhabitants, tending thereby to boost the political muscle of the outsiders. This threat to the authority of the existing leadership (the two incumbent village representatives had been in their position for more than ten years) was more significant as the VMCS held a monopoly on communication with one

government department, the Agriculture and Fisheries Department. This fact meant that it could potentially be turned into a political weapon by soliciting help from the colonial authority.

In actuality, the existing leadership pattern was only slightly altered. In the first place, only a portion of villagers had joined the VMCS. Secondly, compared to the village representatives, the power of the directors of the VMCS was limited in scope and was specialized in the economic and financial sphere. The use of the power was restricted also as a consequence of the dominating presence of the village representatives on the board. Thirdly, it is an undeniable fact that the village representatives were still the exclusive channel of communication between the villagers and the government (represented by the District Office) in the New Territories, and the relevance of the latter was increased in this stage of development of the village. Since 1959, owners of existing huts or of proposed new huts were required to apply for temporary structure permits from the District Office,⁵ and the technical and administrative service of the village representatives was necessary in the process of application. Most of the outsiders who resided in huts built on Crown land, and were in need of pigsties and poultry runs, had perforce relied upon the village representatives to apply for the structure permits. The village representatives were also needed to prove a person's status and character for some other matters, such as the application for a passport to go abroad or for jobs in the police force and the British army.

Even though the VMCS could exercise some political leadership, in

the final analysis it was the village representatives who were the dominant power centre. In the early 1960s, for instance, water shortages often led to disputes among the outsider vegetable farmers. Usually, if the disputants were members of the VMCS, the directors were requested to arbitrate. On the other hand, if one party in the dispute was not a member of the VMCS, or if one of the disputants happened to be a director of the VMCS, the village representatives would be asked to arbitrate. Besides, the outsider directors of the VMCS also needed the village representatives' assistance when they wanted to contact the District Office. Most importantly, in any disputes between the original inhabitants and the outsiders, it was usually the village representatives who were requested to mediate between them.

The potential significance of the VMCS as a political force suffered a serious decline toward the end of this stage. In the second half of the 1960s, the taking up of external employment by villagers had resulted in the availability of another source of income for most of the families in the village, though it affected the original inhabitants to a much larger extent than the outsiders. At the same time, the return from vegetable farming increased because of higher market prices and greater productivity (due to the application of new farming techniques). Consequently, the loans provided by the VMCS were no longer as important to the vegetable farmers as they had once been and so they were seldom utilized. The declining attendance rate of the VMCS members on its election day was an indication of the erosion of its influence in the village, and the erosion

was completed with the formation of the Farming Association in the next stage.

The Present Stage: 1970- In this period divergence in economic interests between the outsiders and the original inhabitants becomes acute. This division is then concretized by the establishment of an organization among outsiders to cater exclusively to their own interests. The political dependence of outsiders on the village representatives decline; at the same time, the leadership status of the village representatives among the original inhabitants is also eroded.

Suddenly, however, planned development in the nearby Tuen Mun New Town changed the whole political situation. The significance of the rural leaders is restored, leading to intensified competition for leadership positions in the village. Administrative and political discriminations between the original inhabitants and outsiders by the colonial authorities, particularly in terms of compensations meted out for land resumed for development purposes, magnify the divergence between the two groups. Intergroup politics flares up with serious repercussions. The village representatives, espousing partisan interests, are unable and unwilling to represent the outsiders' interests vis-a-vis the government, thus souring an already embittered relationship. Outsiders are increasingly led to use their economic organization to pursue political ends. This process is facilitated and legitimized by the colonial government, which is preoccupied with maintaining political stability in the village. As a result, a condition of de facto power bifurcation ensues, while both

power centres are separately held in rein by the government.

The trend of seeking outside employment and of establishing outside business, started in the last stage, accelerates in the present stage, and this movement is especially true for the second-generation villagers. Nevertheless, external employment opportunities have had a differential impact upon the economic interests of the original inhabitants and the outsiders. Almost all the males and young females of the original inhabitants become employed outside the village, and the daily tilling of the vegetable farms is left to the elderly females. Even some of the latter are attracted to work in the construction sector because of the higher wages offered there. Though a large proportion of the second-generation outsider farmers have also taken up occupations other than vegetable farming, almost all the first-generation farmers are still in the farming business, usually with at least one of their siblings as a full-time worker in the farm. This contrasting pattern between original inhabitants and outsiders can be explained by the cultural disdain toward vegetable farming of the original inhabitants and their lower productivity (due to a reluctance to adopt advanced farming techniques). Not inhibited by any cultural contempt toward vegetable farming, the outsiders are more innovative in adopting modern agritechnology and hence are able to reap handsome profits from their farming business; consequently, shifting to outside employment or changing occupations are less appealing. As a result, the number of original-inhabitant households which remains in vegetable farming in So Kun Wat Village is only thirty-five, and a large amount of their land has been either deserted

or leased to outsider farmers. At the present time, the total amount of unused land in the village is estimated to be about 35 acres.

The divergence in the economic interests of the two groups does not take long to be reflected in the organizational life in the village. In 1970, the So Kwun Wat Farming Association, voluntarily organized by the outsider farmers, emerged as another farmers' organization in the village. Though the explanation of its appearance differs,⁶ the organization is clearly designed by the outsiders to further their own interests.

Unlike the VMCS, the Farming Association is registered with the Registrar of Societies, and is subject to the District Officer's (not the Agriculture and Fisheries Department's) supervision. However, the Agriculture and Fisheries Department still renders advice to the organization. The Association is run by a committee consisting of twenty members, two of them being the chairman and vice-chairman respectively with the others being in charge of various duties. Three years after its establishment (1973), the Farming Association managed to build a permanent club on the outskirts of the village. The services offered by the Association include, among others, the transportation of the farmers' products to the vegetable market (which is utilized by about one-third of its membership as most of the members are not vegetable farmers), the operation of a clinic and a kindergarten with seventy students, organization of tours to foreign cities, the provision of relief to the families of deceased member, arrangement of funeral services, and the distribution of gifts such as oil and pork to the members at the end of the year. Like the VMCS, the Association also

assists the Agriculture and Fisheries Department in the administration of government services, such as information on agritechnology, and the dispensation of relief in the wake of natural disasters. Unlike the VMCS, however, loans from the Department are not released to farmers through this Association; instead, the Association helps its members when they apply for them from the Department.

Although there is no explicit rule in the Farming Association deterring original inhabitants from joining, the members of this Association are exclusively outsiders. Some of the members are former members of the VMCS who deserted it to join the new organization, while some others had not joined the VMCS before. At present, the membership of the Association amounts to one hundred and seventy households, including some outsider farmers from adjacent villages. The decline of the VMCS, as reflected in its low attendance rate on election days, contrasts sharply with the prosperity of the Farming Association. What is more important is that the Association serves to foster a sense of mutual identification among the outsiders and to enhance their internal solidarity. The emphasis on welfare provisions is geared to that end. The large (twenty-member strong) deputy committee and the monthly meetings are instrumental in promoting more social interaction among members. To boost its legitimacy and strength, support from the outside is actively sought. The invitation of the chairman of the Waichow People's Association and the social leader of the outsiders in Tuen Mun to speak at the inauguration is a measure to reinforce the group identity of the members as outsiders in the New Territories. In short, the appearance

of the Association indicates a small step towards transforming the outsiders into a distinct economic, social, and (potentially) political group in the village. However, up to this point it is still true to say that the village representatives have the upper hand politically and they are still needed as intermediaries between the colonial government and the village.

Notwithstanding the continual political dominance of the village representatives, structural changes in the village and in its environment have already brought about a reduction of the need of outsiders to politically depend on them. The decrease in the incidence of quarrels between the outsiders and the original inhabitants, together with the efficiency of the police force in maintaining law and order, has greatly undermined the village representatives' power over the outsiders. For the original inhabitants, their growing external orientation (resulting from external employment and the exposure thus generated) has led many of them to be indifferent to village affairs. Consequently, the status and respect accorded to the village representatives in earlier times have diminished. If nothing dramatic intervenes, the political significance of the village representatives and the village as a political arena should have continued to decline.

Nevertheless, something dramatic did happen. The development of the nearby Tuen Mun New Town leads the government to resume some land for development purposes from the village, and the proximity of the village to a nascent industrial complex pushes up the value of land in the area. Suddenly, politics in the village focuses around issues such as land resumption, speculation in land values and terms of compensation. The

government, as the producer and distributor of benefits (compensation and information on layout plans which has a controlling effect on land values), naturally becomes a major factor in village politics. As the village representatives are the officially-recognized channel of communication between the government and the village, they are in a position to capitalize on this development. Using the information obtained from contact with government officials and with real estate entrepreneurs, they are able to make handsome profits from the appreciation in village land values. Furthermore, they also receive benefits directly from the government for their role in quelling possible conflicts in the village during the land resumption.

The planned development of the government thus brings about, largely unintentionally, a resuscitation of traditional rural leadership in the village and an injection of vitality into village politics. This revitalization is based on the government's reliance on the traditional leaders to facilitate the process of land resumption since the administrative capacity of the government to penetrate into the village is limited. Almost overnight, village representativenesship becomes an intensely sought-after boon. Competitors for the positions increase, the need of the competitors to obtain votes from their fellow original inhabitants has lead to the formation of factions and cleavages among them. Development hence brings about political fragmentation in this group.

What is most critical at this point is that development brings different fates for the original inhabitants and the outsiders. As owners of private land, the original inhabitants are entitled to larger amounts

of compensation. Moreover, they are able to profit from land appreciation by selling their holdings to urban speculators. In general, the original inhabitants are quite satisfied with their land transactions, as no objection against land sales to nonlineage members has ever been voiced. Indeed, the distribution of money derived from such transactions among lineage members is known to have occurred quite often in the original inhabitants' groups. In their dealings with the government, the original inhabitants are able to negotiate through the village representatives, if problems related to land resumption and terms of compensation arise. The fact that the government is sympathetic to the complaints of the original inhabitants, the effectiveness of the village representatives in forestalling overt confrontations against the government, and the overall economic insignificance of agriculture to the original inhabitants all contribute to the smooth resumption of land from the original inhabitants.

The picture is totally different with respect to outsiders. Land resumption directly threatens vegetable farming and hence their major source of income. Moreover, unlike the original inhabitants, they are occupants of Crown land, and as such entitled only to small sums of compensation for the vegetable products lost, and a meagre amount of removal fee. These sums are far from sufficient to make a new living elsewhere. Needless to say, as net losers in the planned development game, grievances among outsiders are many. To add to their plight, they are by now unable to rely on the village representatives to negotiate on their behalf with the government, as these leaders are all in favour of land resumption.

Dissatisfaction and distrust of the village representatives become widespread,⁷ and this general feeling is exacerbated by the fact that the village representatives are no longer needed in other dealings with the government. For example, as a result of the inclusion of the outer part of the village into the layout plan for development, it is no longer possible for outsiders to obtain temporary structure permits from the District Office through the village representatives. These and other changes reduce further the control of the village representatives over the outsiders.

At this juncture, the Farming Association steps in and begins to assume a political role. As the only organization which the outsiders can trust and depend upon, they push the Farming Association to contact the District Office on their behalf in spite of the fact that it is not an officially recognized channel of communication.⁸ The chairman of the Farming Association is known by the outsiders to be on friendly terms with officials of the District Office. At the present time, members of the Association rely primarily on this chairman to consult with the officials in the District Office if they have complaints over matters related to land resumption or compensation. In this way, the Farming Association has become a de facto political representative of the outsiders in the village, and its status is unofficially recognized by the government. As such, it has 'usurped' some of the power which was exercised by the village representatives in the past.

That the Farming Association has risen to political prominence of

course can be attributed to its internal solidarity and the backing it receives from its members, but basically it is the attitude of the government as the controller and allocator of resources that is critical. In its policy of sidestepping the village representatives and giving political recognition to the Farming Association, the government has in fact decided to differentiate between the two political groups in the village. It also reflects the thinking on the part of the District Office that to play politics strictly in conformity with the formal administrative rules and to keep a closed eye to substantive politics would mean disorder and direct political confrontation, situations which they try hard to avoid. Through the Farming Association, the government can obtain information about the discontent of the outsiders. It can also manipulate the leaders of the Association to forestall any possible collective action of the outsiders. With their own channel of interest representation, conflicts with the original inhabitants and their representatives are no longer necessary on the part of outsiders.

Ironically, it is largely the result of the government's administrative and political definitions interacting with its planned development which largely gives birth to the political groups and determines the configuration of village politics in the first place. Recognizing different political groups in the village and granting separate representation to them, though a violation of formal political rules, is nonetheless an effective measure to avoid intravillage conflict by means of containment through compartmentalization.

Discussion

To manage conflict through the recognition of de facto political groups and to grant them separate political representation and privileges are a well-established practices of British colonial rule (Polis 1973). In the case of So Kun Wat Village, we find that political recognition was given to an essentially economic and social organization, even though the formal administrative and political rules remained unchanged. This is a strategy of containing intergroup politics in the village through compartmentalization. The formal colonial rules are seen as impractical given the numerical majority of the outsiders in the village, the solidarity of their organization, the possibility of collective actions, and the inability of the village representatives to 'represent' the outsiders or to 'control' them. However, the success of conflict containment through compartmentalization can be attributed to several crucial factors. The dominating presence of the government, reinforced by its roles as the controller and allocator of resources coveted by both village groups, is essential. That the government is staffed by a group of bureaucrats who are nonlocals helps immunize them from village politics. The lack of effective resistance to the government strategy by the original inhabitants is also essential, and this can be attributed to the dependence of the village representatives on the government for favours, the fragmentation of the original inhabitants' groups, the fragmentation of the village leadership due to intense internal competition, and the fact that many original inhabitants have already deserted the village as a political arena.

For the time being, the containment of horizontal conflict through verticalizing it seems to be working quite well. The ease with which the Tuen Mun Residents Advancement Association (composed of outsiders in the Tuen Mun District and with the goal of promoting the interests of the outsiders) was formed in September 1979 seems to indicate that the government is extending this strategy of conflict containment to wider areas of the New Territories. In some aspects, however, the strategy might backfire. By verticalizing political relationships, the government has, knowingly or not, increased the potential for political conflict between itself and the separate groups to which it has given political representation. With growing aspirations among the populace, the government might someday find that it is in an unenviable situation of having not enough resources to keep these groups happy. For those recently granted representation, it is the government which has in the first place raised their political aspirations through the granting of political representation. In the So Kun Wat Village, anyway, the problem is destined to disappear, for sooner or later the village will be obliterated when it is engulfed in the tide of new town development. For other newly settled areas in the New Territories, however, the prospect of administrative and political overload cannot be overlooked.

From a political point of view, the development of a set of pragmatic rules to structure political behaviour in the New Territories, while leaving the formal and increasingly discarded old rules intact, will also bring about unintended political consequences, some of which the British government might not wish to face. As these pragmatic rules are largely devised and

implemented by government officials, they will be left with enormous discretionary power to deal politically with groups and individuals in the New Territories. As the stakes of development are so large, the central role occupied by civil servants in the resource generation and distribution processes will subject them willy-nilly to political forces and power alignments in the area. Corruption, political arbitrariness, and the emergence of patron-client networks (with civil servants playing the role of patron) are real possibilities that might complicate the planned development process. Moreover, the periodical reassignment of civil servants (especially the District Officers) and the personal idiosyncracies of new incumbents will inevitably inject a destabilizing element into New Territories politics, given their critical role in the political arena there. In the long term, if the formal rules of the political game are not changed, we might expect an increasing politicization of the New Territories.⁹

NOTES

- ¹ Additional rights, include among others, the right to housing for adult males and the right to burial places in the village compound.
- ² The collective actions taken by some outsiders in the New Territories include press meetings, protests, petitions, and even fighting in the past years, and suggest the seriousness of the situation.
- ³ According to James Hayes (1962:78), the original inhabitants are supposed to have come from the provinces bordering on the south of the Yangtze river and made their way to South China during the early periods of Chinese history. They were firmly established in the south during the time of the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127-1278 A.D.) and it is a fact that most of the original inhabitants easily trace their descent from ancestors who were settled in the San On district in that period, or elsewhere in the Kwangtung province. The Hakkas, or 'strangers' as the term signifies, are supposed to be descended from the Mongols and to have reached the southern provinces when the Mongol dynasty was overthrown during the middle of the fourteenth century.
- ⁴ The village representation system gradually took shape only after the restoration of British rule to the New Territories in 1945. Before the Second World War, it was the village elders who served to mediate between the colonial government and the villagers. After the War, it was felt that the inauguration of a village representation system would enable the younger village leaders to enhance their political status, these young leaders based their

authority on ability and wealth and they were prepared to challenge the political legitimacy of their elderly counterparts.

⁵ In the case of temporary structure permit, although there was no explicit rule which prohibited individuals from applying by themselves, it was quite difficult for them to bypass the village representatives, as most of them did not know how to apply, and the application procedures took a lot of time and trouble. Moreover, there was a rule stipulating that the erection of any temporary structure should not meet with the objections of other villagers. Reasons for objection to a building normally included controversies about ownership of the land concerned, or about the geomantic (fung-shui) forces thus affected. Whether there was objection or not was proved by the signature of the village representative. Because of this requirement, outsiders were very much dependent on the village representative's help in applying for a temporary structure permit. The permit was necessary whenever a new house or a new physical structure on Crown land was to be built.

⁶ The explanation of the appearance of the Farming Association given by an official in the Agriculture and Fisheries Department was that it arose from personal grievances among the leaders of the existing VMCS. One of them then left the co-operative society and initiated a new one. On the other hand, the reason offered by the members of the Farming Association was that they needed an association to be exclusively for the outsider farmers, so that the profit derived from the marketing of products could be used to serve their own welfare.

- 7 Two incidents can be cited. (1) When the Tuen Mun Highway was under construction in the village in mid-1970s, heavy rainfall led to a landslide in the road, and some of the vegetables belonging to outsider farmers in the nearby fields were thus destroyed. The outsider farmers decided that it was the fault of the construction company and requested a village representative to consult the matter on their behalf with the District Officials. The village representative thought that the outsider farmers should apply for compensation directly from the Agriculture and Fisheries Department instead of directing the grievance against the construction company, and was not willing to take up the case for them. (2) A number of street lamps were given by the District Office to the village in 1978. However, all these lamps were subsequently installed along the inner part of the village road, which was in the residential area of the original inhabitants. As these lamps were applied for by the village representatives, outsiders residing in the outer part of the village were displeased with their location, and considered that the village representatives were indifferent to their interests.
- 8 Its achievements can be glimpsed from an incident involving the construction of a village road. When a hosing project was under construction on the boundary hill of So Kun Wat Village in 1978, the earth removed from the hill was taken by a team of lorries to fill in the searshore near Tuen Mun. The daily operation of this lorry fleet seriously damaged the outer part of the village road. Dust was everywhere when the weather was dry, and it rapidly turned into mud when it rained. The situation caused much

inconvenience to the villagers. At first, a group of original inhabitants stopped the running of the lorries, and threatened not to allow the construction work to continue until a new road was built.

After the arbitration of the village representatives, no more disturbance on the part of the original inhabitants was seen. It was believed that the construction company had offered some compensation to the original inhabitants, while the outsiders were ignored. But the road was still in bad condition; no new road was built. And it soon became clear that other villagers, both original inhabitants and outsiders, were not satisfied with the way the issue had been resolved. Complaints over the road lingered on. Finally, in April 1979, the Farming Association called a committee meeting to discuss the matter, and decided to settle the problem by themselves. A letter was submitted to the District Office by the Farming Association, stating that they would resort to their own methods to deal with the construction company if it did not promise to build a new road within a week.

Exactly one week later, the construction company started to build a new road near the old one. This outcome was what the Farming Association had previously demanded, and it was widely believed by its membership that the construction of the new road was a direct result of their letter to the District Office.

⁹ Some changes in the formal rules, however, have already been introduced. The appointment of a District Advisory Board in Tuen Mun in late 1977 was a means designed by the government to curb the influence of the original inhabitants by incorporating both their representatives and a group of

outsiders into the Board. The terms of reference of the Board would undoubtedly elevate the Board to a dominating position in district politics, while the village representatives would be confined only to the performance of village functions. It is still too early to tell, however, whether the District Advisory Board can supercede the village representation system and become the sole formal structure regulating politics in the New Territories.

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