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SOCIAL ACCOMMODATION OF POLITICS: THE CASE
OF THE YOUNG HONG KONG WORKERS*

by

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SOCIAL ACCOMMODATION OF POLITICS: THE CASE
OF THE YOUNG HONG KONG WORKERS

That economic development is a politically destabilizing force in society is a well-established dictum among social scientists, though dissenting views have been occasionally raised.¹ In many instances, rapid economic development is generative of glaring economic inequalities, which pit social classes against each other and seriously undermine the legitimacy of the political order. The institution of authoritarian political regimes in growing numbers of countries in the world can be seen thus as one of the most drastic responses by the political system to regulate or suppress conflicts arising from momentous changes in the economic sector.²

What is atypical about Hong Kong is that political stability has been maintained in the last several decades amidst miraculous economic growth,³ gross income inequalities, and an only modest increase in the formal channels of political participation by the masses. The political dormancy of the Chinese lower strata can be illustrated by the dearth of interest organizations among them, the paucity of leaders serving to articulate and aggregate their demands and the sparsity of collective actions arising from their ranks. In short, economic polarization in Hong Kong has so far failed to translate itself into political confrontation between the higher and the lower strata.

This study attempts to approach this political paradox through an investigation of the values and behaviour of the young workers in Hong Kong. The theoretical position adopted here is that if the workers' salient needs can be met with resources extracted from nonpolitical channels, and if resources thus acquired are adequate for the purpose, their relationship with

the political system will only be marginal, and hence the political system will not be overburdened by large volumes of unmet demands coming from below. Furthermore, if, in the eyes of the workers, the government and the higher strata do not feature saliently in their perception of opportunities to meet their needs, the stability of the political system will be doubly enhanced. We hypothesize that both of these factors are at work in Hong Kong, and they contribute to the social accommodation of politics in the Colony. The data collected for the study will be used to throw light on the operation of this accommodative process.

There are 373 respondents in our sample, which is divided between 173 males and 200 females, and 173 of the females are the spouses of the males interviewed. The numerical superiority of females in the sample inevitably will result in an over-representation of "political conservatism" in our findings, and this has to be borne in mind in the interpretation of the data. Interviews of these respondents were conducted in the summer of 1978.

Our sample of respondents was drawn from the Lam Tin Housing Estate in the East Kowloon area of Hong Kong. This housing estate is chosen because it is among the largest in the Colony, and the residents there can be considered to be representative of the low-income workers in society. Among the males, a majority of them (81 percent) are manual workers, and this applies also to the working females (84 percent, N=100). Most of the non-working females (N=100) in the sample have also been manual workers before they quitted their job recently so that they could stay home and took care of their small children. In terms of attitude and behaviour, there is no statistically significant difference between the working females and the non-working females, and so they can be considered as a homogeneous social group. A majority of their family incomes fall within the range between HK\$901 to HK\$1,800 per month, which are low by Hong Kong standards. Our respondents' educational achievements

are low: 67.5 percent of them have received some forms of primary education, 21.5 percent have gone to secondary schools and 11 percent have not received any formal education at all. Most of the respondents are young, and the majority of them are under 35. All of them have children, the average number per family is 2.15. In general, our respondents can be described as a group of stably employed young workers with complete families. The study of such a group of workers is of particular meaningfulness in modern Hong Kong. It has been pointed out by one of us that the younger generation in Hong Kong is less imbued with a socio-cultural syndrome of normative and behavioural traits called "utilitarianistic familism", which is characteristic of the older Chinese residents in Hong Kong and which serves to maintain political stability in the Colony.⁴ If such is the case, what would the social/political orientations and behaviour of the younger generation in the lower strata look like, and what will their effects be on the political future of Hong Kong? As our sample is fairly representative of the young Hong Kong workers, it will allow us to delve into some speculative extrapolations.

Salient Needs and the Differentiated Resource Network

In a survey research of this kind, it is virtually impossible for us to conduct an indepth search for an exhaustive list of the needs of our respondents which might have the potential of being politicized if unmet. What we have done instead is to enumerate a number of concrete needs and asked our respondents the channels whereby they are satisfied. These "needs" are selected primarily because we, based on our past experience

with the lower strata in Hong Kong, consider them to be of particular salience to our respondents and that they could be met, if necessary, through political or administrative channels. The "needs" included are: needs related to living conditions, needs related to getting along with others, needs related to financial matters, needs related to seeking employment and needs related to marital adjustment. In interpreting the data, the answer of "not applicable" would indicate that the need concerned is not salient to the respondent, which implies either that the need has already been satisfactorily met, or that the need is not assigned a prominent position by the respondent. Judging from the data collected, in most of the time, the former interpretation would seem to be the more reasonable one.

When asked where have they sought help if they are dissatisfied with their living conditions, about 40 percent of the respondents consider the question not relevant. The fact that they have already obtained the privilege to live in a public housing estate may make them feel that this need has been satisfactorily met. For those who feel the need, 20.4 percent of them have sought help from the government, 9.7 percent have approached their friends and workmates, 8.6 percent have gone to their relatives and 7.2 percent have contacted their parents. Other channels of assistance (neighbours, voluntary associations and prestigious personalities) are of minor significance in this aspect. Also included in these figures apparently are those respondents who have utilized several channels of resource extraction. Still, the impression here is that for those who feel the need, more than half of them have opted for doing nothing.

When queried where they have sought assistance when involved in trouble with others, about 64 percent of the respondents consider the question not applicable to themselves. It has been mentioned by some scholars that the Chinese people harbour obsessive anxiety to avoid conflicts with others and that they are intolerant and afraid of social strife.⁵ This psychocultural tendency might have something to do with the low salience of the need here. For those who feel the need, it can be seen that a predominant majority of them have not sought assistance of any kind. Only 12.9 percent of them have ever approached their friends and workmates, 10.4 percent have sought the help of their parents, 5.3 percent have gone to their relatives, and 4.6 percent have solicited help from their neighbours. Other channels of assistance such as the government, voluntary associations, lawyers and individuals with "face" (prestigious individuals) are of much lesser significance.

In the case of financial needs, only about 23 percent of our respondents have deemed them irrelevant, and this is understandable when taking into consideration their low socio-economic status. For those who feel the need, 49.5 percent have approached their friends for help, the corresponding figures for relatives and parents are 38.2 percent and 33.3 percent respectively. Much smaller proportions of them have tried their neighbours (11.5 percent), employers (10.3 percent), the government (6.3 percent) and voluntary credit associations (4.5 percent). Other channels such as money-lending organizations, voluntary associations and individuals with "face" assume minimal importance to our respondents in the fulfilment of their financial needs.

With regard to seeking employment, the picture that appears from the data is quite different. Here most of our respondents have felt this need, as only about 6 percent of them deny any relevance to the question posed before them. The full-employment economy of Hong Kong and her competitive labour market operate to furnish the Hong Kong workers with ample opportunities to acquire new jobs which offer higher pecuniary incentives. As a result of this, labour turnover among workers is extremely high.⁶ Under these circumstances, informations about new job openings and assistance in gaining entry into other industrial undertakings are valuable resources to be sought after by our respondents. Among those who feel the need, friends (including workmates), newspapers and relatives are the most pivotal channels of help, as 66.8 percent, 26.4 percent and 22 percent of the respondents respectively have utilized them before. Of much lesser significance are neighbours, parents, the government, voluntary associations, and individuals with "face".

As to needs related to marital problems, it can generally be said that our respondents have adjusted quite well maritally, hence about 55 percent of them do not feel the needs. For those who do, most of them prefer to withdraw from seeking help from others. Thus, only 20.8 percent of them have brought their problems to their parents, who are followed, in descending order of importance, by relatives (11.8 percent) and friends (10.8 percent). Channels such as neighbours, voluntary associations, the government, lawyers and individuals with "face" are practically of no significance at all.

What immediately emerges from the review of need perceptions and the modes of resource extraction to fulfill them presented above is that most of the needs enumerated are not particularly relevant to our respondents' daily living. Either these needs have already been largely satisfied, or, even if they are not, our respondents are capable of tolerating the condition of need non-satisfaction. To substantiate the statement that our respondents have a large capacity for tolerance of unmet needs, we have to demonstrate that given such a condition, they are still largely satisfied with the existing state of livelihood. Evidence bearing on this point is available, as 4.6 percent of our respondents are very satisfied with the existing livelihood of their families, 55.8 percent of them express satisfaction, while an additional 31.9 percent think that it is okay. By alluding to these data, we consider it proper for us to maintain that among our respondents, unmet needs have been tolerated without their being transformed into causes for frustration and political action.

Another issue arising from the findings is that, given the fact that in general more than half of the respondents seem to have their needs already met and hence have deemed them irrelevant when queried, of the role played by the government in catering to their needs. If the government has been able to anticipate the needs of the lower strata and channelize resources to their satisfaction, political stability in this case would evidently be one of "administrative absorption of politics", through which potentially salient political issues are safely nipped from the buds.⁷ Our data, however, will suggest otherwise. It is evident from our crude commonsense that resources provided by the government are far from sufficient to meet

the needs of those who choose to make use of public services. For the majority of our respondents, the data indicate that they do not perceive the government as a significant channel of need satisfaction and that they rarely seek assistance from it to solve their problems. Furthermore, their withdrawal from seeking official help cannot be accounted for by their ignorance of the availability of public services, as community needs studies by social workers have repeatedly demonstrated that the common people in Hong Kong are quite knowledgeable of the public services available for utilization. Therefore, in terms of the satisfaction of the needs of the lower strata, the role of the government is both minor and inadequate.

What emerges from the data, then, is that our respondents and their families are able to make use of a differentiated network of resource extraction to meet their salient needs. A "resource network" here means a network of social relationships with indefinite, though narrow, boundaries through which resources can be mobilized to satisfy the needs of the persons and families involved.⁸ As each of such networks we have in mind centres upon a nuclear family, it can be designated as a "family-centric network".⁹ The resource networks constructed by our respondents are differentiated in that different channels of resource extraction are utilized to meet different categories of needs, and none of the channels is employed to meet all needs. In the process of constructing these resource networks, instrumental considerations loom large, and each of the nuclear families concerned is highly rational in the inclusion and exclusion of network

partners (individuals and groups) with a view to achieve maximum resource mobilizability. Moreover, even though such resource networks might be relatively stable in the short-run, changes can be expected in the long-run, which might be due to changes in the environment or family mobility (both social and geographical).

The composition of these resource networks (viz. who are included to meet what need) is influenced by a large number of factors. The strength of the kinship tradition,¹⁰ the prevalence of voluntary associations in society,¹¹ residential patterns, the career patterns of the individuals concerned,¹² the service delivery capacities of the government, the structure of the family system, the ethos of brotherhood, the efficiency of communication and transport facilities, the salient needs of the individuals concerned and their age are some of the important factors which serve to structure the composition of the resource networks.

In the case of the young Hong Kong workers, judging from the data analyzed, it seems that both the government and neighbours do not play a significant role in their resource networks. Only in the case of needs related to living conditions is the government sought out for help, and this might be so simply because our respondents are living in housing estates owned and run by the government. Voluntary associations do not fare well either. As overseas Chinese have been well-known for their ability to organize themselves into voluntary associations for self-help purposes, the nonsignificance of them as a channel of resource extraction here is somewhat surprising. Given the fact that there is still a substantial number of these voluntary associations in Hong Kong, their under-utilization hence

serves to signify that they may be short of resources or that the resources needed to cope with urban living in an industrializing society cannot be provided through these forms of organization. The weakening of traditional, ascriptive ties among the Chinese, the increasing necessity to provide services on a society-wide or area-wide basis, and the growing specificity of the resources demanded, would also contribute to their fading importance. Services rendered by professionals (e.g., lawyers) are seldom utilized, which is probably due to the costs entailed and to the fact that specialist expertise has not yet been fully recognized by our respondents. Individuals with "face", who in other societies assume the forms of patrons, political brokers, caudillos, political party influentials, etc., and play crucial roles in generating and dispensing services to the common people, do not appear to be so in Hong Kong. The lack of a politically significant electoral system in Hong Kong may have deprived the common people in Hong Kong one leverage with which to engage in reciprocal exchange with those resourceful personalities who are seeking public offices. Moreover, geographical mobility and the complexities of urban administration would also preclude the formation of lasting patron-client networks, even when an electoral system is there, an illustrative case in point is Guatemala City, where, according to Bryan R. Roberts:

the advantages of the patron-client relations are specific and not diffuse. Rewards are received for services given, but the transaction does not continue expanding through the recurring adjustments of obligations and payments. It is this that makes these urban patronage relationships distinct from those that might be found in the provinces; for the esteem and compliance of clients are only on occasion visible to the patron in a large and busy city. Also, amid the complexities of urban politics and administration it is difficult to identify with certainty the source of any favor. Under these conditions the patron has

no guarantee that clients are constant in their support for him. Clients are uncertain as to whom they are indebted for the favors they do receive and are reluctant to commit themselves to one patron. The patron-client relationship is thus not a means to continue and expand relationships when there are not specific services to be exchanged. Patronage, like kinship and friendship, cannot be used to consistently organize at either the individual or the group level, and like these other relationships, is but one possible recourse in coping with urban life.¹⁵

The fact that political influentials in Hong Kong depend on the government for their power and status explains their detachment from the common people and their unwillingness to forge patronage ties with them. Under such circumstances, the insignificance of individuals with "face" in the resource networks of our respondents is self-evident.

What then left behind as essential channels of resource extraction in the resource networks of the young Hong Kong workers are parents, relatives and friends (including workmates), and the latter group is of enormous importance. The data tend hence to indicate that among the young workers in Hong Kong, family and kinship ties are of less significance than friendship ties, and, except in situations involving emotionally-charged problems (e.g., marital adjustment), they are less utilized than primary ties forged with friends and workmates. Friends and workmates are particularly relied upon to deal with problems of an instrumental and short-term nature.

The unique socio-political context of Hong Kong and her accelerating technological development have thus brought forth an increasing differentiation of primary group structures among the Hong Kong workers, and they are skillfully manipulated to cope with their problems. Furthermore, what is distinctive in the Hong Kong case is that the norm of reciprocity in governing the process of exchange among network members seems to be not

particularly prominent. 43.4 percent of our respondents admit that those receiving help from them have not helped them in the past; and 50.1 percent of them claim that they do not cherish the expectation that people who are helping them now would receive help from them in the future. We are not quite sure what the data here mean; it seems, however, that direct reciprocity is not stressed upon, but whether indirect reciprocity is essential has to remain problematic for lack of information.

On the whole, our respondents are relatively satisfied with their livelihood as they are able to meet needs quite well through their own personal efforts or through the acquisition of resources from a differentiated resource network deliberately constructed for the purpose of need satisfaction. If the needs are still left unmet, our respondents seem to be capable of tolerating the inconveniences and frustrations thus generated and maintaining their dissatisfaction within bounds.

Perceptions of Alternative Channels of Resource Extraction

As the differentiated resource networks fabricated by the young Hong Kong workers are based largely upon social relationships with other individuals and groups, and as the government, political and social influentials, professionals and voluntary and public organizations do not feature conspicuously in these networks, they can therefore be considered primary networks, and their size, in terms of the number of persons involved and the amount of resources transacted, must remain small. Through these networks, the needs of the young workers are to a large extent satisfied. As a result of the availability and relative effectiveness of these social

channels of resource acquisition, the needs of the young Hong Kong workers are seldom politicized, i.e., transformed into political demands directed to the governmental sector for satisfaction. A situation like this, in which society is capable of absorbing issues which have the potentiality of politicization, we call it "the social accommodation of politics". Given the existing need structure of the young Hong Kong workers as represented in our sample and the structural arrangements geared to their satisfaction as provided by the differentiated resource networks, we can also say that the level of political salience among them is relatively low.

As a structural arrangement for need satisfaction, the differentiated resource networks do not constitute the only means for resource acquisition for the young Hong Kong workers. If "social accommodation of politics" is to serve as an essential contributory factor to political stability in Hong Kong, then the utilization of these networks has to be perceived by them as the only legitimate means of need satisfaction. Alternative channels of resource acquisition, the government and the higher strata in particular, have to be perceived by them to be irrelevant, or even illegitimate. In other words, political salience will be lowest "when an individual sees no relationship whatsoever between a given political object and his goal-oriented behaviour, which is channelled entirely towards non-political objects."¹⁴

One of us has established elsewhere that, given the predominant identification among the Chinese to their family and its interests, political action as a goal in itself rarely features prominently in their minds.¹⁵ The laissez-faire economic policy of the Hong Kong government,

its deliberate non-intervention into the social organization of the Chinese community, and its minor economic presence in the society of Hong Kong would also mean that it cannot pose as an obstacle to need satisfaction by the young Hong Kong workers. As a matter of fact, the Hong Kong inhabitants in general have a rather delimited conception of the role of the government. It is seen primarily as a guarantor of social and political stability. Needless to say, the adoption of a more active role by the government in the realm of social welfare and income redistribution is always welcome by the lower strata, but it is not strenuously insisted upon. When asked about whether they feel that the government has the responsibility to take care of the common people, 19 percent of our respondents assert "great responsibility", 71.8 percent pick the answer "responsibility", while only 3 percent absolve the government of any possible responsibility. Given this low expectation toward the government, and taking into consideration the fact that the government has in the last decade or so stepped up the process of service delivery to the poor and disadvantaged (however meagre the services are), the attitude of our respondents to the government is fairly favourable. Thus, 0.3 percent of them think that the government has shown great willingness to take care of the common people, 37.5 percent consider it to be willing, and 32.2 percent feel that the government has at least shown a little bit of willingness to do so. In general, the government's performance so far is in conformity with our respondents' role expectations.

Political action directed at the upper classes, in like manner, is also remotely perceived by our respondents as a channel of resource

procurement. The status of Hong Kong as an open economy dependent on the international market may have convinced many of them that the principle of zero-sum game does not rule in Hong Kong.¹⁶ The wealth and status of the upper strata are not seen to result from a process of economic exploitation which deprive the lower strata their rightful shares. To probe into this aspect, we have asked our respondents whether they would agree that a man in Hong Kong has to divest others of their money in order to get rich. The responses given are quite revealing. 91.2 percent of them do not agree with the statement, and only a trickling 4.8 percent agree with it. Therefore, feelings of antagonism toward the upper strata are extremely weak. As a matter of fact, wealthy people who make it on their own efforts are seen with admiration by many Hong Kong workers.

In a certain sense, the young Hong Kong workers can be depicted as a type of privatised worker as conceptualized by David Lockwood. One of the characteristics of a privatised worker is that he is strongly motivated to view social relationships in pecuniary terms. Based on this conception, he does not think of a society divided up into either a hierarchy of status groups or an opposition of classes. His model of society is one in which individuals are associated with, and dissociated from one another less by any type of social exchange than by the magnitude of their incomes and possessions.¹⁷ As a result,

Power is not understood as a power of one man over another, but rather as the power of a man to acquire things: as purchasing power. Status is not seen in terms of the association of status equals sharing a similar style of life. If status is thought of at all it is in terms of a standard of living, which all who have the means can readily acquire. It may not be easy to

acquire the income requisite to a certain standard of living and hence qualify for membership in a more affluent class; but given the income there are no other barriers to mobility.¹⁸

This non-antagonistic attitude toward the upper strata consequential to the pecuniary view of social stratification¹⁹ is further reinforced in the mind of the young Hong Kong workers by a general belief in the fluidity of the stratification system in the Colony. 60 percent of our respondents are of the opinion that there exist opportunities in Hong Kong for the upward mobility of the common people. Such a view of mobility opportunities apparently is not conducive to class conflicts.

One more factor which tends to harmonize class relationships is the congruence between the behaviour of the upper-strata individuals and the role expectations held by our respondents. They are asked what responsibility do the wealthy people have, in their opinion, to help the poor. 8.3 percent of them consider that the wealthy have a great responsibility and 56 percent regard them as responsible. Given such low role expectations, our data show that our respondents are not disappointed. Even though none of them thinks that the wealthy people have demonstrated great willingness to help the poor, still 19.9 percent regard that they are willing and 36.5 percent have detected a degree of willingness among them.

When such delimited conceptions of the roles of the government and the upper strata is coupled with a general belief that these role expectations have been more or less realized, it is not surprising to find that our respondents would explain their current livelihood primarily in terms of their individual efforts and the resources they can mobilize from their primary resource networks. When asked who should they depend upon

for help when in difficulties, the findings are, however, somewhat puzzling. When the possible channels are presented to them one by one, it is found that 75.3 percent consider that their fellow family members should be relied upon, and for relatives, friends, voluntary associations and charity societies, government and someone with "face", the figures are 64.6 percent, 70 percent, 65.6 percent, 67.9 percent and 34 percent respectively. What these would suggest is that at the attitudinal level, except for those with "face", all these channels are theoretically important for resource acquisition. However, as the data previously presented have shown, in actuality the government, voluntary associations and charity societies are seldom relied upon for assistance. In addition, as we have also indicated above there still are needs unmet but which condition is somehow tolerated, the under-utilization of these channels is quite difficult to comprehend. One way out of this dilemma is to treat this piece of data as reflecting a dimly-held expectation which has been learned from the mass media or other channels of information, yet it has not been seriously entertained or internalized. Alternatively put, it seems that the actual expectation from the government and other public organizations are much lower than the ones given to us.

To further support our interpretation of these idiosyncracies in the data, let us consider other pieces of information. When requested to explain the low socio-economic status of the poor people in Hong Kong, 11.3 percent of our respondents attribute it to "fate", 38.6 percent explain it in terms of the indolence of the poor and 22.8 percent use the broad category of "Hong Kong society" as the causal factor. When further

probed as to their opinion on the means available to the poor people if they are to improve their standard of living, 81.2 percent choose "one's own efforts", 4.3 percent pick "one's children's achievements", 5.1 percent would rely on the "unification of the poor people to fight for their rights", while 2.4 percent of them opt for "help from the government". When putting all these findings together, the perception of the opportunity structure in Hong Kong by the young Hong Kong workers is pretty clear. If actions directed toward both the government and the upper strata are not deemed to be instrumental in acquiring resources to satisfy one's need, then politics as a means to achieve one's goals can be largely counted out. Consequently, political salience is further suppressed.

Class Consciousness and Perception of Collective Action

The pecuniary orientation of the young Hong Kong workers and their perception of opportunities for upward mobility in their society inevitably foster a low sense of class interests and class consciousness. And we may add here a further observation that the desire to become an independent proprietor with one's own business, in conformity with some traditional Chinese ideals, is still very much in the mind of the young Hong Kong workers.²⁰ Social mobility through individual efforts militate against the formation of class consciousness. Moreover, the rapidly growing economy and the rising per capita income of the young Hong Kong workers have already enabled them to move upward along the socio-economic ladder, and they are "successful" in comparison to their parents. That economic prosperity is

detrimental to the formation of class consciousness has been reported in studies of other societies,²¹ and an inverse relationship between the two phenomena is particularly evident in the case of Hong Kong. The ideological divisions which seriously hinder the development of trade unions in Hong Kong, the fragmentations of the unions, the persisting paternalistic relationships between employers and employees, and the operation of ascriptive and particularistic ties (e.g., ethnicity, regionalism) within the working class are powerful inhibiting factors to the development of class consciousness and class actions.

The lack of working class solidarity in Hong Kong and their relative passivity (as indicated by the low rates of work stoppages in the past decades²²) are well-known facts. In contrast, the picture arising out of the data is somewhat striking. It seems that at least at the attitudinal level our respondents are sympathetic to the interests of their fellow workers, and that they claim that they are willing to participate in class actions to further their common interests. When presented with a hypothetical situation in which the poor people have already organized to fight for their rights, 46.6 percent of our respondents say that they will join them, while 13.4 percent of them are hesitant. Another illustration of identification with one's fellow workers is that 65.7 percent of our respondents would prefer to see their neighbours buying colour televisions while they themselves are not able to do so, than to see a wealthy man who is a stranger earning several million more dollars. This finding is quite important when we take into consideration the fact that many workers would choose as their reference group their fellow workers, particularly those living close by, making

comparisons with them.²³ Thus, 79.1 percent of our respondents indicate that they would derive satisfaction with themselves when they, upon comparison, know that many people in Hong Kong are doing less well than themselves. Culling these data together, our respondents seem to be quite aware of some common interests between themselves and other Hong Kong workers. Nevertheless, this awareness may not necessarily be deep-rooted, and it has so far been only lightly converted into overt behaviour. Moreover, when taking into consideration their attitude toward the upper strata, these common interests do not seem to be defined in such a way that antagonism toward the wealthy will automatically ensue.

This incongruence between attitude and actual behaviour is again evident in interpreting their relationship with the government. A more "participatory" attitudinal stance seems to prevail, but it is seldom substantiated by explicit actions. When asked whether they have taken any action in the past to express their disapproval of a government policy which adversely affects their interests, 88.5 percent of them give a negative answer. And, among the 7.8 percent of those who have taken actions, most of them are concerned with minor matters (e.g., physical conditions in their buildings, noise pollution, etc.), and the actions taken are extremely moderate (e.g., writing to newspapers, going to see the government officials concerned). At the attitudinal level, on the other hand, they seem to be more "activist". For example, 46.9 percent of them declare that they will move into action in the future if they are adversely affected by government policies. When queried as to the kind of action they have contemplated, about 56 percent of them refuse to answer,

which indicate that they are still unclear about the channels through which to express their opinions to the government. Among those who have given definite answers, these can be broken down as: 34.5 percent will opt for personal contact with the government officials in charge, 22.4 percent will file complaint through the mass media, 8.5 percent will seek help from the mutual-aid committees in their buildings and from other kinds of non-governmental organizations, 7.3 percent will petition to the Governor and other high-level government officials, 6.7 percent will ask for help from the Urban Council or the UMELCO,²⁴ and 3 percent of them will make public statements or make their cases known to the TV, radio and newspaper reporters.

The data presented in this section thus far show that, at the behavioural level, the relationship between the young Hong Kong workers, the upper strata and the government are in the spirit of the "social accommodation of politics", for actions which are directed to the latter two are few. Among the actions taken, they are individualistic in nature and seldom involve collective endeavour. On the other hand, it can be visualized that the attitudes of the young Hong Kong workers are changing, though only gradually. They are more and more inclined to assert their rights in a collective manner and are becoming increasingly aware of the channels to do so. That these attitudinal tendencies are not yet fully translated into political actions may be due to the fact that, at least up to the present moment, the social networks which they have fabricated are still resourceful enough to meet their needs fairly satisfactorily, and political actions, which would incur higher costs and possibly risks, would hence appear to be of secondary importance. However, as we may surmise,

the mechanism of social accommodation of politics seems to be weakening in force, and, in the future, as more and more resources will have to be extracted from the government, the attitudinal tendencies of the young workers will be there to instigate them to participate further into the political process.

Economic Development, Depoliticization of the Lower Strata, and Political Stability

The maintenance of political stability in the process of economic development is contingent in no small measure upon the depoliticization of the lower strata in society. What this means is that the lower strata, which in many cases are not the greatest beneficiaries from economic development (compared to the middle and upper strata), have to be kept from constituting a source of political conflict. Economic development in many developing countries, in particular, necessitates that the condition of depoliticization be realized since the lower strata are expected or even forced to make sacrifices so as to release resources for capital formation in the economy. Two dimensions of depoliticization can be identified: normative and structural. One example of the normative mode of depoliticization is provided by Ulf Himmelstrand. In his words,

Depoliticization seems to imply a transformation of political ideologies into a set of more or less distinct administrative technologies based on a widespread consensus as to what kind of goals one should try to attain. Even if ideological differences are not wiped out altogether, ideological differences are deemphasized in a depoliticized political community.²⁵

Conceptualized in these terms, "depoliticization of politics" may imply at least three things. First, it may mean simply the development of ideological consensus. Second, depoliticization may imply that the impact of ideology in practical politics is becoming weaker, which is tantamount to a separation of functions of ideological statements and of practical politics. Third, the term depoliticization has been used in the sense of a decreasing saliency of manifest ideological statements.²⁶ Theoretically, it is difficult to find fault with the normative conception of "depoliticization"; however, the conditions stipulated by it can seldom be fulfilled. In most countries of the world, ideological differences are rife, even in those countries which have once been conceived to have entered into an era marked by an "end of ideology".²⁷ In countries where ideological conformity seems to be the norm, it usually turns out upon further analysis that what exists is only forced ideological conformity. The political dormancy of the young Hong Kong workers, in like manner, cannot be attributed to their identification with the ideology of the ruling classes, as this is far from the truth. We cannot expect a society characterized by ethnic, cultural, economic and ideological divergences such as Hong Kong to rely upon ideological consensus for the depoliticization of its lower strata and hence for the furtherance of political stability.

The two other implications of depoliticization, on the other hand, are more relevant, but then they are not of much help. It is a fact that the young workers in Hong Kong seldom couch their political opinions in ideological terms and that they rarely criticize the policies of the government or the distribution of power in Hong Kong in reference to some

specific ideologies. Consequently, we can talk about the separation of the functions of ideological and practical politics and the low saliency of manifest ideological statements as being conducive to depoliticization of the lower strata in Hong Kong. However, what really matters in Hong Kong, as in many other countries, is not ideological politics, as seen by Himmelstrand, but the so-called "practical" politics which deals with the administrative and service-delivery aspects of governance. Whether political stability can be maintained or not depends on a large measure upon its depoliticization, as these countries are still suffering from problems arising from scarcity of resources and the ever-rising aspirations of the lower strata.

In sum, the normative conception of depoliticization is hence too narrow, too difficult to implement and is of little theoretical or practical use in understanding politics in empirical societies.

Compared to the normative conception of depoliticization, the structural conception is of much greater theoretical utility. Underlying its assumption is that depoliticization is a result of the structural arrangement in society, and it achieves a state of depoliticization of the lower strata in spite of the fact that ideological differences and disagreements about practical politics abound in society. The appropriateness of a particular mode of structurally-based depoliticization of course is relative to the distribution of power, the organizational patterns of the people, the intentions of the elite, the dominant ideology, the international environment, and the trajectory of historical development in the society concerned. However, based on a comparative study of a number of societies

where depoliticization of politics has been achieved (irrespective of their long-term effectiveness), the following are the major structural modes:

(1) Coercion: Political power is applied in such a manner that the lower strata are coerced into submission. The lower strata are thus denied the right to participate in political decision-making. The prerequisites for the deployment of the coercive method of depoliticization usually include a well-organized and solidary upper strata, a weakly organized or fragmented lower strata, a concentration of the means of coercion and the existence of a dominant ideology legitimating economic, social and political inequality. Such a full battery of conditions can hardly be found nowadays, but many of the advanced societies (e.g., Britain and Germany) have adopted this strategy in one way or another in their early stages of modernization.

(2) Political Representation: The lower strata are inducted into the orthodox political processes by being granted the right to vote and the right to organize themselves into interest groups with their own representative elites. Such a structural arrangement will turn the members of the lower strata into full-blown political actors on, at least theoretically, an equal footing with other members in society. The lower strata are politically active and they can exercise a measure of control over their representative elites. Many of the advanced Western societies (excluding socialist countries) have employed this strategy. Even in socialist countries, the lower strata are theoretically and legally represented in the decision-making processes in the political system, though in reality political power is monopolized by the dominant elite and their party and is jealously guarded.

(3) Regulated Political Participation: Under this structural arrangement, the lower strata are admitted into the political system under a set of specified conditions which in practice serve to circumscribe their power. This strategy is usually utilized when the lower strata cannot be totally ignored by the ruling strata either because of ideological reasons or because they are relatively powerful and organized. Political participation by the lower strata in modern socialist countries is one form of this regulated political participation. Another notable form can be provided by the political corporatism typical of the Latin American countries. A "corporatist" regime

is characterized by strong and relatively autonomous governmental structures that seek to impose on the society a system of interest representation based on enforced limited pluralism. These regimes try to eliminate spontaneous interest articulation and establish a limited number of authoritatively recognized groups that interact with the governmental apparatus in defined and regularized ways. Moreover, the recognized groups in this type of regime are organized in vertical functional categories rather than in horizontal class categories and are obliged to interact with the state through the designated leaders of authoritatively sanctioned interest associations.²⁸

Under political corporatism, lower-strata individuals participate as a group or as a number of functionally specific groups through state-approved, carefully regulated associations.²⁹ These groups are never allowed to be politically autonomous, and their political performance is dependent upon the will of the state.

(4) Mediation by the Elites: The lower strata indirectly participate in the political system through the mediating elites. Usually in such cases an electoral system which gives the lower strata the vote has thus made them a potentially powerful political force. However, political

apathy, ignorance of the channels of political demand-making, dearth of political resources or the deliberate efforts of the political elites to avoid from mobilizing the masses (especially in deeply-divided societies where competitive mobilization of the masses by the elites will spell disaster for the whole political system) may drive the masses to depend on the elites to articulate and aggregate their interests in the political arena on their behalf. Consequently, the lower strata are rendered politically dormant, and the elites can exercise great discretionary powers unhampered by their subordinates. Two major subtypes of elite mediation can be identified. (a) Consociationism: This is characteristic of societies beset with communal cleavages (ethnic, religious, cultural, etc. or a coincidence of several of them), such as the Netherlands,³⁰ Belgium,³¹ Lebanon,³² and Malaysia.³³ The operation of the consociational model is contingent upon "an elite cartel whose members share an overarching commitment to the survival of the arena within which their groups compete, and who seek to negotiate among themselves and enforce, within their groups, the terms of mutually acceptable compromises."³⁴ The lower strata in each communal groups deliberately entrust the right to political decision-making to their elites, who then operate to maintain political stability by means of compromises and mutual concessions. (b) Patron-clientism: This is a common feature in developing societies and to some extent can be said to characterize some forms of politics (e.g., machine politics in some American cities) in advanced societies. "A patron-client relationship is a vertical dyadic alliance, i.e., an alliance between two persons of unequal status, power or resources each of whom finds it useful to have as

an ally someone superior or inferior to himself. The superior member of such an alliance is called a patron. The inferior member is called his client."³⁵ The patrons themselves are oftentimes hierarchically organized so that some are the clients of the others. Typically the favours the patrons give to the clients are material in kind, while those which the clients do for their patrons involve the expenditure of labour or effort and, of much more importance in many developing countries, voting their patrons into public offices.³⁶ Usually a patron-client network is small in size, as it is based on the close relationship between the members involved. In societies with scarce resources, the political functions of the patrons are especially crucial to the satisfaction of many needs (either individual or collective) connected with modern living.

(5) Interest Representation by the Ruling Class: In this case the ruling class itself will assume the role of the representative of the lower strata, which, short of rebellion, have no way to assert their political independence vis-a-vis their rulers. Normally the function is performed by having the administrators (e.g., civil servants) playing the roles of the representative or by using the political party (particularly in the one-party states) to articulate, aggregate and cater to, the interests of the lower strata.³⁷ Independent politicians not supported or favoured by the ruling class are usually not allowed to survive. Provided that adequate channels of information on the wishes of the lower strata are available to the ruling class, and that it has sufficient resources to meet the anticipated needs of the lower strata, interest representation by the ruling class can be a very effective instrument of depoliticization in a society where economic well-being is the primary concern of the lower strata.

The structural modes of depoliticization mentioned above are depicted in a crude, ideal-typical manner; empirical societies usually combine several of them in their depoliticization efforts. What is distinctive of Hong Kong, however, is that none of the structural arrangements for depoliticization of the lower strata is applicable here. For one thing, they are all political forms of depoliticization, the operating principle of which is to deprive the lower strata of the power or the need to participate in the political process. In other words, the political system deliberately intrudes into society to achieve the purpose of depoliticization. Except for the coercion model, which intentionally brushes the interests of the lower strata aside, the other strategies willfully deploy political means to structure the needs of the lower strata and to channelize them into the political arena for solution. In contrast to the coercion strategy, all the other modes of depoliticization, through inducing the lower strata into accepting the rules of the orthodox political game, undertake to build an aura of legitimacy for the political system among them, and such legitimacy is deemed necessary by the ruling class to underwrite political stability in the society concerned.

Depoliticization of the lower strata in Hong Kong, however, follows another route. It is different from the strategies mentioned above in that it represents a social form of depoliticization. Under this type of depoliticization, which we have designated as "the social accommodation of politics", a complex, finely elaborated and highly differentiated organizational network at the basic level of society is able to garner enough resources to cater to the needs of the lower strata; consequently, these needs, already limited in scope by the capability of the lower-strata

Chinese to tolerate need non-satisfaction, are thus restrained from being channelized into the political system for solution. Oftentimes this basic-level organizational network is primary in nature, in that it consists of small groups of individuals who engage in exchange of resources and who are affectively attached to each other. The political system in Hong Kong not only withdraw from tampering with the social sector, it, in fact, calculatedly provides, as far as possible, it with facilities for its further elaboration.

An essential structural feature in Hong Kong which allows the social accommodation of politics to take shape is a disjunction between polity and society in the Colony, by which we mean that mechanisms which serve to link up the two sectors are limited and, for those available, they are not demonstrably effective. The disjunction between polity and society in other societies is bridged, with varying degrees of success, by formal arrangements such as the political party, the legislature, the electoral system, etc. Formal structures integrating the lower strata in Hong Kong with the polity are, practically speaking, nonexistent. Those claiming to play that role, such as the UMELCO, the ward system of the Urban Council and the City District Officers Scheme suffer from limited executive and statutory power, and their utilization by the lower strata are low. Informal "bridges" like the mass media, opinion surveys by the government, interest groups, personal contacts with government officials, petitions and others do not fare much better. Most of the influential interest groups (e.g., the Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese Manufacturers Association) serve to represent the interests of the elite groups in Hong

Kong, and hence leave the lower strata virtually untouched. The disjunction between polity and society in Hong Kong operates to keep the social sector more or less self-contained, any unmet needs in society would have difficulty in breaking away from society and finding an inlet into the polity.

To secure the effectiveness of the social accommodation of politics in Hong Kong, other factors are also critical, but they can only be briefly mentioned here. The nearly monolithic solidarity of the elites in Hong Kong no doubt would prevent a situation of disgruntled elites mobilizing the masses for self-interests from happening. Elite-mass conflict has so far been reduced to the minimum by the open nature of the economy (thus debarring a zero-sum version of class interests from arising), growing economic prosperity, rising per capita income, full employment of the workers and the availability of opportunities through individual efforts. The restraints exercised by the trade unions in launching political or economic aggressions, their organizational weakness and their fragmentedness, in addition, deprive the young Hong Kong workers the organization apparatus for collective action. Furthermore, the young Hong Kong workers' splitting up into small, primary exchange networks in no way is a facilitating factor to their political mobilization.

Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that through the social accommodation of politics, Hong Kong has been thus far able to maintain political stability whilst undergoing rapid economic development and amidst the

glaring socio-economic inequality thus generated. Compared to other modes of depoliticization of the lower strata, which are largely political in nature, the social accommodation of politics hinges upon the coexistence of a relatively "underdeveloped" polity and a relatively "overdeveloped" society, and is hence a social mode of depoliticization. That social accommodation of politics in Hong Kong is possible is due primarily to the disjunction between polity and society, the non-interventionist philosophy of the ruling strata, the resourcefulness of the social sector, a booming economy and the low mobilization potential of the Hong Kong workers. As a result of the social accommodation of politics, issues and needs in society are kept from being transferred from the social sector to the polity for resolution.

Looking into the future, the social accommodation of politics as a mechanism of depoliticization will become less and less effective. Problems which can only be dealt with at a society-wide basis are on the rise, particularly in the case of housing, and the resources available to society for need satisfaction are becoming depleted because of the gradual breakdown of the primary networks (especially the family system) and because those upwardly mobile increasingly tend to adopt an individualistic orientation. Moreover, as can be seen from our data, the young Hong Kong workers have espoused a broader conception of the scope of governmental activities and a more activist political role for themselves. Thus, they seem to be psychologically prepared to gain entry into the political arena and try their luck there. Given the fact that in the last decade or so, a growing number of activist intellectuals and students has emerged to initiate

organizations among the lower strata (particularly on a community or neighbourhood basis) to strive for their "rights", bridges linking up society and polity are slowly taking shape. In this new context, a serious economic downturn in Hong Kong can plunge the Colony into political trouble if no measures are taken to alleviate it.

Notes

- 1 See Claude Ake, "Modernization and Political Instability: A Theoretical Exploration," World Politics, vol. 26, no. 4, July 1974, pp. 576-603, for a review of literature; and Samuel P. Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay," World Politics, vol. 17, no. 3, April 1965, pp. 386-430, for an exposition of a well-known line of argument.
- 2 For a comparative review, see Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds.), The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
- 3 According to H.C.Y. Ho, estimates of Hong Kong's gross domestic product (GDP) derived from various sources show that from 1947/48 to 1974/75 the average annual rate of growth of GDP at constant prices is about 8 percent and in per capita terms about 4.8 percent. Between 1961 and 1974, per capita GDP (at constant prices) grew at an average annual rate of 6.3 percent for Hong Kong, as compared to 3.6 percent for the developed market economies and 3.2 percent for the developing market economies. See his The Fiscal System of Hong Kong (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 10.
- 4 Lau Siu-kai, "Utilitarianistic Familism: The Basis of Political Stability in Hong Kong," in Ambrose Y.C. King and Rance P.L. Lee (eds.), Social Life and Development in Hong Kong (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, forthcoming).
- 5 See, for example, Lucian W. Pye, The Spirit of Chinese Politics: A Psycho-cultural Study of the Authority Crisis in Political Development (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), and Richard H. Solomon, Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1971).
- 6 Ronald Hsia and Laurence Chau, Industrialization, Employment and Income Distribution (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 12-14.
- 7 Ambrose Y.C. King, "Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level," Asian Survey, vol. XV, no. 5, May 1975, pp. 422-39.
- 8 For a comprehensive treatment of the concept, see, for example, K.N. Sharma, "Resource Networks and Resource Groups in the Social Structure," The Eastern Anthropologist, vol. XXII, no. 1, Jan.-April, 1969, pp. 13-27.

- 9 Other kinds of resource networks can of course be identified, see Larissa A. Lomnitz, Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 133-4.
- 10 See David Parkin, Neighbours and Nationals in an African City Ward (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 185-6; and J.S. LaFontaine, City Politics: A Study of Léopoldville, 1962-63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 141-8.
- 11 See Sandra T. Barnes and Margaret Peil, "Voluntary Association Membership in Five West African Cities," Urban Anthropology, vol. 6, no. 1, Spring 1977, pp. 83-106.
- 12 Bryan R. Roberts, Organizing Strangers: Poor Families in Guatemala City (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 148-9.
- 13 Ibid, pp. 186-7.
- 14 Moshe M. Czudnowski, "A Salience Dimension of Politics for the Study of Political Culture," American Political Science Review, vol. 62, 1968, pp. 878-88; p. 882.
- 15 Lau Siu-kai, "Utilitarianistic Familism."
- 16 Cf. Talton Ray, The Politics of the Barrios of Venezuela (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1969), p. 158.
- 17 David Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society," in Martin Bulmer (ed.), Working-Class Images of Society (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 16-31; pp. 23-26.
- 18 Ibid, pp. 24-5.
- 19 In general, it can be said that the pecuniary view of social stratification is shared by the Hong Kong inhabitants, and community leaders are no exception to the norm. For example, 39 percent of the leaders in Tsuen Wan, an industrial community in Hong Kong, classified the populace into rich and poor, and another 20 percent of them divided them up into employers and employees, see Graham E. Johnson, Natives, Migrants and Voluntary Associations in a Colonial Chinese Setting (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1971), p. 248. In a household survey in Kwun Tong by C.Y. Choi and Y.K. Chan, it was also found that more than half of the respondents (N=1,293) used criteria of one kind or another which are related to "earned income" to classify the people of Hong Kong, see Housing Policy and Migration: Data-Book (Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, October 1976), pp. 132-3.
- 20 Cf. Peter C. Lloyd, "Perceptions of Class and Social Inequality among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria," in Helen I. Safa and Brian M. Du Toit (eds.), Migration and Development: Implications for Ethnic Identity and Political Conflict (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975), pp. 189-204; pp. 196-7.

- 21 See, for example, Talton Ray, The Politics of the Barrios, p. 154; Richard R. Fagen and William S. Tuohy, Politics and Privilege in a Mexican City (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 138-9; and Wayne A. Cornelius, Politics and the Migrant Poor in Mexico City (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 166-200.
- 22 According to the annual reports issued by the Labour Department of the Hong Kong Government, man-days lost in industrial disputes in Hong Kong in the period 1959-1977 range from a low of 4,751 in 1976 and a high of 67,156 in 1965-66. These figures are extremely small when measured by international standards.
- 23 Cf. W.G. Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-Century England (London: Penguin, 1966).
- 24 The Urban Council is a public body with elected and appointed members and operates to deliver a limited collection of services in the urban areas of Hong Kong. There is a narrowly restricted franchise for the election of approximately half of its members. The UMELCO (Office of the Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils) is a non-governmental, public organ which deals with public complaints and representations by the citizens, but which is given no formal statutory authority by the government.
- 25 Ulf Himmelstrand, "Depoliticization and Political Involvement: A Theoretical and Empirical Approach," in Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan (eds.), Mass Politics (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 64-92; p. 65.
- 26 Ibid, pp. 69-70.
- 27 See Chaim I. Waxman (ed.), The End of Ideology Debate (New York: A Clarion Book, 1968).
- 28 James M. Malloy, "Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America: The Modal Pattern," in James M. Malloy (ed.), Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), pp. 3-19; p. 4.
- 29 See, for example, Kenneth P. Erickson, The Brazilian Corporative State and Working-Class Politics (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1977).
- 30 Arend Lijphart, The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1968).
- 31 Val R. Lorwin, "Segmented Pluralism: Ideological Cleavages and Political Cohesion in the Smaller European Democracies," Comparative Politics, vol. 3, no. 2, Jan. 1971, pp. 141-176.

- 32 David R. Smock and Andrey C. Smock, The Politics of Pluralism: A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana (New York: Elsevier, 1975).
- 33 Karl von Vorys, Democracy Without Consensus: Communalism and Political Stability in Malaysia (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975).
- 34 Ian Lustick, "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control," World Politics, vol. 31, no. 3, April 1979, pp. 325-44; see also Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977).
- 35 Carl H. Landé, "The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism," in Steffen W. Schmidt et al (eds.), Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1977), pp. xiii-xxxvii; p. xx. See also Jean Grossholtz, Politics in the Philippines: A Country Study (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964).
- 36 See, for example, Arturo Valenzuela, Political Brokers in Chile: Local Government in a Centralized Polity (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1977).
- 37 See, for example, Henry Bienen, Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 39 and 193; Nelson Kasfir, The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics with a Case Study of Uganda (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 282-3; and Raymond F. Hopkins, Political Roles in a New State: Tanzania's First Decade (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971).