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The Government, Intermediate
Organizations and Grass-roots Politics
in Hong Kong

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by

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THE GOVERNMENT, INTERMEDIATE ORGANIZATIONS AND GRASS-ROOTS POLITICS IN HONG KONG

In the past fifteen years or so, structural changes along several lines in Hong Kong have substantially transformed the relationship between the colonial government and the ordinary Chinese people. In the first place, the government has assumed an increasingly crucial role in the delivery of urban and social services (notably public housing and an assortment of welfare provisions) to the relatively disadvantaged sector of society. Consequently, direct interaction between the government and the people, though somewhat reluctantly undertaken by both parties, has grown in quantity at a great rate. Secondly, ever since the acquisition of the Colony in 1843, the British colonial administration has exercised a form of "indirect rule" in regard to the colonized Chinese nationals. Though this "indirect rule" has never materialized in any form of statutory self-government by the Chinese people, the British colonial administration has consistently relied upon a select group of Chinese leaders and organizations to mediate between itself and the ruled. This highly institutionalized pattern of governance has played a prominent role in maintaining peace and order in the Chinese sector, and without imposing serious financial and administrative strain on the colonial governmental apparatus. Recently, conditions have taken a significant reverse turn. Due to growing economic prosperity

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which has raised the general standard of living of the common people, the emergence of modern values and behavioral patterns, and the takeover of many economic, social and cultural functions by the government, most of the Chinese intermediate organizations which have in the past mediated between the government and the ordinary people have lost their functions, financial viability and the _raison d'etat_ for existence. As almost all of these intermediate organizations have either traditionalistic and ideological (being mostly supportive of the Nationalist regime in Taiwan) colorations, they have become increasingly unattractive to the general public. With both leadership and membership resources drying up, these organizations are swept to a state of limbo. On the part of the government, instead of resurrecting these organizations for modern uses, it has opted to abandon them. Consequently, the modus vivendi between the two parties is awkward, and is largely detrimental to improving their functioning. More unfortunately, the decline of these intermediate organizations has not been compensated for by new types of community and political associations among the ordinary Chinese people. Trade unions, which in other places are instrumental to articulating and representing the interests of the lower orders, are conspicuous in their inability to serve political representational functions in Hong Kong. Coincidental with the expansion of governmental functions and activities, therefore, is a "vacuum" in the field of intermediate organizations between the government and the ordinary people. Thirdly, by no means oblivious of the need for viable mediating

mechanisms between itself and the ordinary people, the govern-
ment has taken the initiative to construct a multitude of
"channels of access" which are made available to the latter.
The intentions of these arrangements on the part of the govern-
ment are clear: to solicit information from the public so that
effective policy-making can be made, to anticipate the behavioral
tendencies of the ordinary people, to rectify administrative
misdoings, to improve the relationship between the government
and the governed, and to enhance the image of the government
in society. In the words of Ambrose Y. C. King, these efforts
constitute in effect a hat trick of administrative absorption
of politics,[1] which aims at depoliticizing the urban masses
by sucking up political issues into the administrative frame-
work for resolution, and by simply transforming political
issues into non-issues or mundane administrative chores to be
dealt with by professionals. That these efforts are far from
successful can readily be gleaned from the riots in 1966 and
1967-1968, and the low level of utilization of these official
channels by the ordinary people. Recently, the government itself
seems to be rather disappointed with the achievements so far
accomplished by its administrative inventions. Fourthly, with
the deterioration of intermediate organizations and the increas-
ing dependence of the ordinary people on the government for
service delivery and administrative information, grass-roots
politics in Hong Kong has taken on new forms. Unconventional
forms of political participation are on the rise. They frequently
bypass the formal channels of bureaucratic encounters, and are
usually collective in membership composition. What is more

disheartening to the government is that these unconventional or
"anomic" modes of political participation by the urban masses
have become increasingly acceptable to the general public, and,
given time, will be institutionalized as an effective means of
exerting political influence by the politically deprived. These
modes of political participation are by nature elusive to
administrative control from the center, which accounts for the
government's annoyance. Moreover, the current state of affairs
of the intermediate organizations does not render them amenable
for official use to accommodate the new tides of political
participation or to control them. Finally, in order to restore
peace and order, two options at structural reorganization are
open to the government. The first option hinges upon a substantial
restructuration of the social organizational infrastructure at
the grass-roots level, which would entail a costly intervention-
ist posture by the government. The alternative, which is the
one actually adopted, is an enlargement of the administrative
absorption of politics process. In essence, it involves further
administrative penetration into the grass-roots, and to channel-
ize political participation there into administratively endorsed
paths. The latter option naturally is less costly in the short
run and necessitates less societal reorganization. Ergo, it is
more in tune with the stance of the government which is still
socially non-interventionist in character. To what extent the
latter option is effective in depoliticizing the urban masses
and in integrating them into the political system we have to
wait and see. However, in the last section of this paper, we
shall argue, by extrapolating into the future, that the adoption

of the latter option will, in the long run, be more costly, as
it will force the government willy-nilly into a situation
wherein substantial transformation of the political system has
to be made in order to accomplish the goal of maintaining polit-
ical peace and to cut down on the sizeable administrative
expenses; while the first option, though more costly in the
short run, will turn out to be more economical and effective
in the long haul.

The Decline of Intermediate Organizations

The Chinese people are renowned for their voluntaristic
organizational capabilities. Through establishing voluntary
bodies to cater to their social and cultural needs, the Chinese
in Hong Kong, since the ceding of the place to the British,
had demonstrated their ability to maintain social peace and a
decent level of social well-being among their kind. Not uncomm-
only, these voluntary associations were able to expand their
functions both to come to grips with larger-scale social
problems (like the Po Leung Kuk in the area of helping girls
and young women in need of care and protection[2]) and to assume
the political function of mediating between the Chinese people
and the alien British authorities. In the latter function, the
Tung Wah Hospital had been a case in point. The functions of the
Tung Wah in the past were never purely medical. In fact, it
served as the unofficial "government" of the Chinese community
in the eyes of both the British colonial authorities and the
Chinese authorities in China.[3] Through these intermediate
organizations and their leaders, the interests of the Chinese

were heard, and, to a certain extent, taken care of by the
colonial administrators. The de facto autonomy of the Chinese
community, under the control of a cohesive layer of prosperous
Chinese businessmen and social notables, was deliberately
encouraged by the British authorities before the Second World
War. This autonomy was further enhanced by the right granted to
the Chinese to operate a private police force of their own (the
District Watchmen).[4] The reliance of the British colonial
administration on the indigenous organizations of the Chinese
for administrative and political purposes had in effect segre-
gated the Chinese community from the colonial government, with
the Chinese leaders providing the linkages between the two on
the one hand, and mobilizing resources within the Chinese comm-
unity to take care of its own needs on the other. Under such an
arrangement, depoliticization and political peace were maintained.
Needless to say, the unrelenting fluidity of the Chinese popul-
ation and their low socio-political aspirations would ensure
that political issues, if any, seldom spill over beyond the
boundaries of the Chinese community.[5]

The decade immediately after the restoration of British
rule in Hong Kong after the conclusion of the Second World War
witnessed the virtual indispensability of intermediate organiz-
ations in the Colony. The massive influx of Chinese refugees
into Hong Kong, the gloomy economic and employment conditions,
the wide-ranging social problems awaiting remedies, and the
meagreness of resources in the hand of the government under-
scored the need to mobilize and channelize societal resources
and initiative to cope with the "crisis" situation. Moreover,

the unpreparedness of the colonial government to tackle with
problems of such magnitude, and the inexperience of the under-
staffed bureaucracy immersed so far in classical laissez-faire
doctrines reinforced the urgent need for voluntary efforts. In
this decade, there was a proliferation of intermediate bodies
of various kinds. They included community organizations like the
Kaifong Associations (neighborhood organizations), and nonterr-
itorial organizations based on ascriptive and functional ties,
such as clansmen associations, district associations, and chambers
of commerce (shang hui). In many chambers of commerce, ascriptive
ties in the forms of district and dialect connections loomed
very large in spite of their allegedly universalistic nature.

All these intermediate organizations served the Chinese
community in a variety of ways: welfare provisions to the needy,
job referrals, political representation, education, physical
accommodation of new immigrants, recreation, financial aid,
legal and administrative assistance, reinforcement of group
solidarity, cultural preservation and the conferral of status
to those serving as leaders. The aggregate efforts of these
organizations contributed in no small measure to the integration
of the new immigrants into the urban society of Hong Kong. The
dependence of many ordinary people on these organizations for
service provisions subjected them to the control of these organ-
izations and their leaders in one way or another. Though it was
necessarily true that many individual Chinese were apathetic to
these organizations and did not participate in their activities,
their structural and functional viability could not be denied.
Their functions in organizing the Chinese community and in linking

it up with the larger political order by serving as intermediaries were from the hindsight well-nigh indispensable. To the government, these organizations served as effective mechanisms whereby the Chinese community could be brought under some measure of administrative control.

In the last fifteen years or so, the decline of these organizations as functional intermediaries between the government and the ordinary people was a well-known phenomenon to the government, the general public, and the organizational leaders themselves. Empirical research on the recent development of these organizations is scanty, hence the conditions conducive to this long-term decline process can only be surmised.

In the case of the Kaifong Associations, the process of decline can be illustrated by the shrinkage of their active and passive membership, the depletion of their financial resources, the failure to recruit young and dynamic leaders, and the inability to execute many of the functions which formerly constituted the mainstay of their performance. The incessant bickerings among the Kaifong leaders further detracted from the internal solidarity of a movement whose very survival was already in serious jeopardy.[6]

A glance at the financial status and activities of a representative group of Kaifong Associations in 1978 will throw light on the moribund conditions of these organizations.[7]

The Mongkok Kaifong Association
Major services provided (and recipients): medical service (15,000), loan service (0), emergency relief (200) and funeral expenses contributory scheme (2). Budget: HK$200,000 (one HK$ is equivalent approximately to

5 US$). Major sources of revenue: membership dues and donations. Number of members: 13,000. Estimate of active membership: 150.

The Aberdeen Kaifong Association
Major services provided (and recipients): funeral expenses contributory scheme (228), emergency relief (10), medical service (21,000), and primary education (160). Budget: HK$350,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues and donations. Number of membersL·3,200. Estimate of active membership: 100.

The Chuk Yuen Cottage Area Kaifong Welfare Advancement Committee
Major service provided (and recipients): financial aid (1,800). Budget: HK$18,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues and donations. Number of members: 300. Estimate of active membership: 250.

The Shamshuipo Kaifong Association
Major services provided (and recipients): medical service (12,000), scholarships (no data), emergency relief (1), primary education (1,000), and new year gifts (500). Budget: HK$140,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues and donations. Number of members: 1,200. Estimate of active membership: no data.

The Tai Hang Sai Kaifong Welfare Association, Ltd.
Major services provided (and recipients): medical service (10,000) and funeral expenses contributory scheme (120). Budget: HK$40,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues, charges/fees, donations and contributions for specific purposes. Number of members: 2,300. Estimate of active membership: 100.

The Tsimshatsui Kaifong Association
Major services provided (and recipients): medical service (31,300), primary education (no data), and emergency relief (2,000). Budget: HK$83,000. Major source of revenue: donations. Number of members: 2,600. Estimate of active membership: 520.

The Wan Tau Hom Resettlement Kaifong Welfare Association
Major service provided (and recipients): material relief (130). Budget: HK$24,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues and donations. Number of members: 500. Estimate of active membership: 130.

The Yaumati Kaifong Welfare Advancement Association
Major service provided (and recipients): medical service (8,000). Budget: HK$50,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues and donations. Number of members: 1,200. Estimate of active membership: 150.

When we take into consideration the fact that the populat-

ions supposedly served by these Kaifong Associations range from
several tens of thousand to several hundreds of thousand, the
figures above are depressing. Moreover, a lion's share of the
tiny budgets of these organizations was earmarked for the upkeep
of physical equipment and for employee emoluments.

In a study of the Shek Kip Mei and Tsz Wan Shan Housing
Estates, two lower-class residential areas, Angela Kan has
found that more than 90 percent of the residents there did not
make use of the services provided by their Kaifong Associations.
Among the reasons given by the respondents, it is revealing to
note that "don't know of its existence", "no time" and "no
interest" were the most frequently cited.[8]

The predicament of the Kaifong Associations is shared
by a predominant majority of other traditionalistic Chinese
voluntary organizations. The following presents the financial
and membership conditions of a representative group of these
organizations in 1978:

(1) Clansmen Associations

Chow Clansmen Association
Major services provided (and recipients): scholarships
(45) and funeral expenses contributory scheme (15).
Budget: HK$60,000-$70,000. Major sources of revenue:
membership dues and donations. Number of members: 1,200.
Estimate of active membership: 130.

Hong Kong Sin Clansmen Association
Major service provided: nil. Budget: HK$4,000. Major
sources of revenue: membership dues and donations.
Number of membersL 180. Estimate of active membership:
40.

Pang Clansmen Association
Major services provided (and recipients): medical aid
(nil) and relief for funeral expenses (2). Budget: HK$12,000.
Major source of revenue: donations. Number of members:
700. Estimate of active membership: 20.

Tam Clansmen Association
Major services provided (and recipients): scholarships
(6), funeral expenses contributory scheme (2) and emer-
gency relief (nil). Budget: HK$30,000. Major sources
of revenue: donations and rent from properties. Number
of members: 1,700. Estimate of active membership: 35.

(2) District Associations and Chambers of Commerce

Chiu Chow Merchants Mutual Assistance Society
Major services provided (and recipients): distribution
of winter clothing (7,000), emergency relief (1,000),
clinic (11,000) and funeral expenses contributory scheme
(no data). Budget: HK$200,000 (HK$160,000 for the wel-
fare department). Major sources of revenue: membership
dues, donations and others. Number of members: 500.
Estimate of active membership: 100.

Chiu Chow Residents' Public Association
Major services provided (and recipients): scholarships
(10) and funeral expenses contributory fund (no data).
Budget: HK$72,000. Major sources of revenue: membership
dues, donations and contributions for specific purposes.
Number of members: 3,000. Estimate of active membership:
400.

Chung Shan Commercial Association of Hong Kong
Major services provided (and recipients): emergency
relief (110), funeral expenses contributory scheme
(6), and clinic (720). Budget: HK$30,000. Major sources
of revenue: donations and rent from properties. Number
of members: 5,000. Estimate of active membership: 100.

Hong Kong Pan U District Association
Major services provided (and recipients): funeral expenses
contributory scheme (24) and emergency relief (nil).
Budget: HK$50,000. Major sources of revenue: membership
dues, donations and contributions for specific purposes.
Number of members: 550. Estimate of active membership:
400.

Kwangsi Province Natives Association
Major services provided (and recipients): funeral expenses
contributory scheme (3) and scholarships (30). Budget:
HK$20,000. Major sources of revenue: membership dues and
contributions for specific purposes. Number of members:
600. Estimate of active membership: 300.

Ng Yueh District Association
Major service provided (and recipients): funeral expenses
contributory scheme (13). Budget: HK$12,000. Major sources
of revenue: membership dues, donations and contributions
for specific purposes. Number of members: 2,000. Estimate
of active membership: 40.

Sam Sui Natives Association
Major service provided (and recipients): scholarship
(210). Budget: HK$40,000. Major sources of revenue:
contributions for specific purposes and rent from pro-
perties. Number of members: 2,000. Estimate of active
membership: 40.

Sun Wui Commercial Society of Hong Kong
Major services provided (and recipients): funeral expenses
contributory scheme (2) and emergency relief (nil).
Budget: HK$54,000. Major source of revenue: rent from
properties. Number of members: 1,800. Estimate of active
membership: 50.

Tung Koon District Society
Major services provided (and recipients): scholarships
(120), funeral expenses contributory scheme (100) and
emergency relief (no data). Budget: HK$70,000. Major
sources of revenue: membership dues, charges/fees, dona-
tions, and contributions for specific purposes. Number
of members: 4,000. Estimate of active membership: 1,000.

Even these dismal figues most probably have exaggerated
the actual performance of these traditionalistic organizations,
especially with regard to membership and finance. At the present
moment, these organizations are really inward-looking organiza-
tions bent on self-preservation. Most of the Kaifong Associations,
in catering to their need for organizational maintenance, have
gradually shifted from charity work to organizing educational,
recreational and skill-training activities which are revenue-
generating. Their function as political intermediary between
the government and the ordinary people is no longer significant.
In the same vein, the clansmen, district and commercial associ-
ations have entered into profit-making activities which serve
to financially underwrite their continual existence as organ-
izational entities. In a rare study of the Waichow Hakkas in
Hong Kong, Hsieh Jiann has traced in detail the metamorphosis
of this large organizational complex from one executing bona
fide traditional functions typical of traditionalistic Chinese

voluntary associations based on ascriptive ties to one whose major concern is financial solvency.[9] To generalize further, organizations of this kind which are much smaller in scale should be facing even greater hurdles in their quest for survival. Compared to the Kaifongs, the function of these organizations as political intermediaries is even more negligible. Even in their heydays, their connection with the colonial authorities is fragile. Their deterioration will inevitably bring about their final abandonment by the government.

As the aging of leadership and membership, financial insolvency, and shortage of dynamic leadership continue to haunt these traditionalistic organizations, sooner or later they will become historical legacies.

It is not difficult to discover the reasons for the collapse of the intermediate organizations in Hong Kong. Firstly, industrialization and value changes in Hong Kong have rendered traditionalistic voluntary organizations both ideologically unattractive and functionally redundant. The rise of the standard of living of the general public has reduced the demand for private welfare. The identification of most of these organizations with traditional Chinese values and with the Nationalist regime in Taiwan natually makes them unacceptable to the new generation of Hong Kong Chinese. Secondly, the assumption by the government in larger scales the responsibilities for delivering educational, social and financial services to the disadvantaged in society has inadvertently undermined the importance of these organizations as welfare institutions.[10]

Joining these organizations is no longer deemed to be imperative even by the most needy, with the exception perhaps of the elderly whose funeral needs are compelling. Thirdly, with particular relevance to the Kaifongs, locality feelings among the ordinary people have gradually attenuated. Large-scale internal migration and the newness of the planned communities are not breeding grounds for locality identification Hong Kong is in essence an atomistic society with the familial groups as the basic organizational units.[11] Neighborliness among the ordinary people is surprisingly low, and locality spirit almost nonexistent.[12] These, plus an increasing population density and the accelerated diffusion of high-rise buildings as the modal residential accommodations among the ordinary people, with their own complex organizational and physical problems, make the Kaifong Associations appear to be oversized and unwieldy organizational monsters. Fourthly, in a modernizing urban society like Hong Kong, urban problems have so changed in nature that global solutions involving substantial resource investments and coordination of efforts by the government are called for, and the government is the only agency equipped to undertake these herculean tasks. In the process of centralizing decision-making, traditionalistic organizations have to be relegated to oblivion. Even organizations of this kind which are organized on a society-wide basis, such as the Tung Wah Hospitals and the Po Leung Kuk, have to take on a new role, however reluctantly they are, as the agency of the government, and act in accordance with its strategic demand. Fifthly, the co-option of increasing numbers

of able Chinese leaders into the central decision-making process
of the government has thus made them unavailable for leadership
positions in these traditionalistic organizations. What is more
disastrous is that the upper-level Chinese leaders are no longer
organically linked up with the lower-level Chinese leaders such
as those found in traditionalistic organizations; consequently,
their role as political intermediary is drastically undermined.
Finally, the new generations of Chinese are more politically
active and articulate; traditionalistic organizations, being
more servile in political proclivity, are just not palatable
to them.

The demise of these intermediate organizations has mani-
fold effect on Hong Kong. The least serious one is its impact
on social welfare, as this can be taken care of by the govern-
ment, however inadequate it is. The most serious outcome lies
in the political pole. The peculiar situation in Hong Kong is
that these organizations are the only organizational linkage
between the government and the ordinary people. Devices such
as mass political parties, trade unions and political patrons
which in many developing countries serve as political intermed-
iaries are missing here. The demise of these organizations in
practice creates an "intermediary vacuum" in the political
system. This "vacuum", if left unfilled, will generate both
a politically apathetic mass, and a mass which is politically
volatile enough to be mobilized into disruptive activities, as
the 1966 and 1967-1968 riots so forcefully proclaim.

Ineffectiveness of Official Channels
of Access and Grass-Roots Politics

As prolifically documented in community-needs studies
in Hong Kong, the most salient needs identified by the ordinary
people tend to cluster around housing and decent living con-
ditions.[13] The former includes needs related to resettlement,
fair compensations for relocation or displacement, and accept-
able rent levels. The latter comprises needs for transportation,
sanitation, security, pollution control, etc., which are the
ingredients of a tolerable living environment. From a political
point of view, these needs   constitute the media through
which political issues pitting the people against the government
will arise, as a substantial proportion of the ordinary people
are now accommodated in residential complexes built, owned and
administered by the government.

Even though the need for the formation of new locality
organizations to supplant the by now defunct Kaifongs is well
recognized by the government; until the early 1970s, locality
organizations failed to appear. Without locality organizations
that can be controlled by the government, confrontations between
the government and the people cannot be averted.

It is easily understandable that the government is reluctant
to see powerful political organizations in the grass-roots.
The norm of administrative efficiency entrenched so deeply in
the mind of the colonial officials naturally makes them resent
any possibility of political interests interfering with profess-
ional decision-making, which is seen as technically neutral
and objective. On the part of the ordinary people, the shortage
of dynamic leadership in their own ranks will ·render any attempt

at self-organization futile. The hard fact that the public

housing estates are closely guarded by the government debilitates

many would-be organizers. Community organizations run by pro-

fessional social workers, though with the potential of being

transformed into organizations having interest articulation and

representation functions, are inhibited from doing so owing to

their financial dependence upon the government, and the social

workers' largely "neutral" political temperament. As a result,

these community organizations are in fact control organizations

instilling values of self-help and ideals of "good citizen"

among their beneficiaries. Even if they might be willing to take

upon political functions, they will still be paralyzed by

their meagre membership base, the undersupply of local lead-

ership talent and the predominant youthfulness of their member-

ship.[14]

While locality ties are the most potentially effective

basis upon which the ordinary people can be organized, controlled,

and integrated into the political system in the current context,

the failure to capitalize on them by both the government and

the people themselves in the 1960s and the 1970s leaves the

"intermediary vacuum" unfilled. Recently, simmerings of unrest

stemming from unmet housing and locality needs were evident to

all. To tackle with the increasingly unstable political situa-

tion, the government again resorted to the administrative

absorption of politics. Through a restructuration of the local

administrative apparatus, which featured the establishment of

a number of City District Offices headed by City District

Officers (CDOs) in the later 1960s, the government hoped to

fabricate new official channels of access for the common people,
and in due course to bridge the communication gap between itself
and the governed.[15] However, without conferring executive power
over other government departments
to these "political" officers, they were doomed from the start
as functional official intermediaries. It turned out after a
number of years in operation that these administrative bodies
served mainly to unilaterally transmit information and decisions
from the government to the people, and to collect information
on the latter for consumption by the former. Upon evaluation,
both functions had not been done well. As agencies representing
the interests of the people _within_ the administration, the CDOs
were patent failures.[16] Lately, their importance even inside
the government has been downgraded as a result of their recog-
nized ineffectiveness. Lower ranking officers are now being
assigned to these postings, thus further undermining their
utility. In addition, the low level of utilization of their
services by the public is a stark indicator of the low esteem
granted the CDOs by the common people.[17]

Aside from the CDOs, two other official channels of
access of imputed significance are the ward offices of the
Urban Council and the Umelco Office (Office of the Unofficial
Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils of Hong Kong).
The former are run by the elected members (elected on an extremely
limited franchise) of the Urban Council, which is responsible
mainly for sanitation, sports and cultural activities, and the
provision of some urban services. The latter is deliberately
set up by the government as an alternative to the stillborn
ombudsman scheme. Both bodies are designed to deal with complaints

and representations from the general public. In the case of the ward offices, issues lying within the domain of the Urban Council might have the chance of resolution, as the Council at least has its own allotted resources to get some kind of things done. In the case of the Umelco Office, on the other hand, even though it is granted the right to information from the government, the right of access to government officers, and the right to challenge the action taken by government department, these rights by themselves are not sufficient to enable the Umelco Office to impose its will upon government officials. Consequently, most of the positive achievements of the Office are due to the goodwill and cooperative attitude of some government officials and the nonthreatening nature of the issues under review.

In general, what is evident from the figures released by the ward offices and the Umelco Office is a low level of utilization of their services by the ordinary people, and their inability to resolve the major problems inflicting them.

Since its introduction on November 1, 1965, the Urban Council Ward System, with its ten ward offices, has seen an increasing volume of cases brought under its attention. The following figures represent the number of cases received in the period 1968-1978:[18]

Year	Number of Cases
1968	2,792
1969	3,047
1970	6,020
1972	8,754
1974	8,435
1976	11,060
1978	10,294

Taken in all, the number of cases brought to the attention of the elected Urban Councillors is small, which bespeaks of the low level of salience of the ward offices as a means of problem-solving to the ordinary people. It is no startling finding that more than half of the cases were related to housing needs. They accounted for 61.6 percent, 57 percent, 62.7 percent, 52.3 percent and 45.3 percent of the total number of cases in 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976 and 1978 respectively. The balance was connected with problems of hawkers, markets, legal aid, police behavior, social welfare and water supplies. What is shocking is that a predominant majority of the complaints and requests brought to the ward offices fell outside of the scope of activities, and hence authority, of the Urban Council. In 1974, 1976, and 1978, for instance, the proportion of cases falling under the aegis of the Urban Council (meaning that the ward offices can at least take some action) were 12.1 percent, 14.1 percent and 14.8 percent respectively. Needless to say, these figures reflect the ignorance of the ordinary people as to the appropriate channels of lodging complaints and filing representations. But the thrust of the matter is that most of them, who had mustered enough initiative to make the attempt at influence, had to be sent away disillusioned.

In the words of the government, the purpose of establishing the Umelco Office was "to promote closer relationships between the Unofficial Members of the two Councils and members of the public, who were invited to call at the office to put forward their views on any matter of public interest or to lodge individual complaints against Government department."[19] Like the cases

of the ward offices, cases related to housing and resettlement were the modal cases brought to the Office, though they usually accounted for less than half of the total number of cases, being 28 percent in 1970-1971, 38 percent in 1971-1972, 35 percent in 1972-1973, 35 percent in 1973-1974, 27 percent in 1974-1975, 25.5 percent in 1975-1976, and 23 percent in 1976-1977. In numerical terms, the volume of cases dealt with by the Office was rather small, ranging from 834 in 1970-1971 to 3,169 in 1977-1978. Again, like the ward offices, though slightly better, the proportion of cases dealt with which were classified as Type A cases (those where the complaints was fully rectified or the client's requests met in full) was not encouraging. The rest of the cases were either classified as Type B cases (those in which some degree of advice, information, explanation or assistance was given) or Type C cases (those in which Umelco was unable to help because the complaint was found to be unjustified or because of action taken by the government department was in accordance with the approved prevailing policy). The proportions of Type A, Type B and Type C cases in selected years are listed below:[20]

Cases Completed

Year	Type A	Type B	Type C
	%	%	%
1970/71	25	46	29
1971/72	31	39	30
1972/73	29	42	29
1973/74	26	47	27
1974/75	22	57	21
1975/76	22	58	20
1976/77	21	60	19
1977/78	14	58	12

From these figures, it appears that the Umelco Office is essentially a mechansim for the transmission of official inform-ations and informal advice, falling far short of being a device for solving the problems of the ordinary man. In this sense, its self-declared mission of intermediary between government and people is by and large unrealized.

Understandably, besides the above-mentioned channels, other channels of interest representation are extant in Hong Kong. As enumerated by John Walden, Director of Home Affairs, they are: advisory boards and committees, informal contacts with individuals or groups through city district offices in the urban areas, petitions by individuals to the Governor or his officers, public statements, commissions of inquiry, contacts between government departments and their customers, letters to the editors of newspapers -- <u>particularly in the English newspapers</u> (italics mine), ring-in programs on the radio, public affairs programs on the TV and radio, and green papers on public policy.[21] To the man in the street, most of these channels are beyond their reach, either because of the obstacles posed by literacy and political sophistication, or because of their time-consuming nature. That the official channels of access to the government cannot function to integrate the ordinary Chinese into the political and administrative system is beyond doubt. The outcome is political apathy and cynicism among the common people.[22]

Nevertheless, the pressing social needs of the ordinary people, the efforts at urban development by the government which necessitate land resumption and resettlement of those displaced,

and the growing number of people living in public housing and
having direct experience with government administration, all
tend to politicize the grass-roots level of Hong Kong. The
futility of the official channels of access has unleashed
various kinds of small-scale collective political actions against
the government.

Collective political actions stemming from need polit-
icization (primarily housing and environmental needs) have
several noticeable features. First, they involve only loose
and ad hoc organizations. In most cases activist organizations
are formed from scratch to press for specific benefits, and
will be dissipated after concession have been obtained. Only
in rare cases (like Tai Hang Tung) have these organizations
been institutionalized as permanent interest groupings. Second,
these small-scale collective participations of the ordinary
people normally seek concrete, often single-shot benefits from
the government. They are usually spurred by a threat to common
interests from the government. Third, the tactics adopted by
these small-scale collective actions are mainly petitions
and publicity campaigns (press meetings, hoisting   banners
and big-character posters, demonstrations, sit-ins, collection
of signatures, etc.) In general, these actions are essentially
deferential and nonthreatening to the government. Nonetheless,
the constant resort to exotic gimmicks and the inclusion of
a quantum of confrontational posture by the participants do
not fail to attract widespread attention in a compact society
like Hong Kong. Anyway, they tend to put the administration in
an embarassing situation. Fourth , leadership in these actions
mostly comes from the outside, in view of the paucity of its

supply among the ordinary people. Activist organizations of the
ordinary people are a favorite target for assistance from middle-
class intellectuals, community workers, charitable or religious
bodies, and foreign benefactors. Fifth , these actions frequently
bypass the hierarchical structure of the government and bring
the matter directly to the top-level officials. Hence, the
Governor of Hong Kong and some heads of departments (notably
the Secretary and Director of Housing) are the most favorite
targets of appeal. Finally, demand-making by the ordinary people
are primarily attempts to influence the government decision-
making process only on the _output_ (policy-implementation) side.
Being unconcerned with general policy issues, they do not
constitute anti-system movements. In fact, in the words of
Huntington and Nelson, under some conditions (like those obtained
in Hong Kong) they may even be system-supportive:

> But unless the aggregate volume of individual or small-
> group demands by the poor is very high, such partici-
> pation is not likely to significantly affect the
> broader political system, either in terms of the alloc-
> ation of public resources and priorities, or in terms
> of the distribution of power. A system where most low-
> income participation is confined to contacting or small-
> interest groups operates to maintain the status quo.
> Pressures that might otherwise take a collective form,
> and be directed to earlier stages of policy formation
> or to the composition of the government itself, are
> diverted into discrete, separable and small demands,
> which can be met, in full or in part, or rejected one
> by one. [23]

Up to the present moment, political actions are still
too sporadic in incidence, too transitory, and too small in
scale to pose any serious threat to the administrative appar-
atus. Nevertheless, their appearance and the attention they
have drawn from the general public create political problems
for the government, and generate serious administrative overload.

In a time when the government is sincerely attempting to present
a favorable image of itself, such actions from the ordinary
people have to be forestalled as far and as soon as possible.

In 1965, the Wah Kiu Yat Po recorded 12 cases of polit-
ical actions of this kind, which increased to 33 in 1976, 33
in 1977 and 24 in 1978. What is ominous here is not their
quantity, which is small, but their general acceptability to
the general public as an effective tactics of political influence.
Without viable intermediate organizations, especially local
organizations, it is extremely difficult for the government to
control or co-opt political movements which are scattered,
sporadic and volatile in nature.

Government's Response: Further
Administrative Penetration

The erosion of the layer of intermediate organizations,
the expansion of government's service-delivery system, and the
ineffectiveness of official channels of access to integrate
the lower orders into the political system are conducive to
the rise of unconventional and "anomic" forms of political
demand -making by the ordinary people, whose well-being is
increasingly tied to government policies. In such a context,
politicization of social needs is unavoidable. To the govern-
ment, in its effort to maintain political peace, two options
are available. One of these is to resuscitate social organiza-
tions among the ordinary people, while the other is further
administrative penetration.

Efforts directed to the resuscitation of social organ-
izations among the ordinary people, in the current setting,

inevitably have to include a large amount of administrative
decentralization and the delegation by the government of both
resources (financial and physical) and authority to a multitude
of relatively autonomous social groups. The result will be a
large number of "private governments" at the grass-roots level,
each of which is put in charge of catering to the day-to-day
needs of the people under its jurisdiction. In the current
"intermediary vacuum", such an approach will have to involve
a lot of initiative from the government's side both to mobilize
local efforts at organization and the construction of a network
of linkages between the government and these groups.

To maintain political peace through further administ-
rative penetration will, in an ideal sense, necessitate a large-
scale expansion and reorganization of the government bureau-
cracy. This enlarged bureaucracy will then directly organize
the ordinary people, and to incorporate these officially-
sanctioned and controlled grass-roots organizations into the
administrative apparatus. Local leaders thus created or fostered
will then serve as quasi-government officials. Organizations
not subscribing to this format will be disallowed. To success-
fully implement such a strategy, it is crucial that coercive
means in society be concentrated in the hand of the government,
and that it is prepared to apply it when deemed necessary.
The result of penetration is an administrative society tightly
controlled from the top.[24]

What the government has opted to do so far is a half-
hearted pursuit of the latter alternative. Government officials
are patently distrustful of strong local organizations, which

might be infiltrated by anti-system and criminal elements. Their unwillingness to allow political consideration to infringe upon the supposedly efficiency-oriented administrative process make substantial administrative and political decentralization impossible. Since the mid-1970s, the government did begin to initiate local organizations in the form of Mutual Aid Committees (MACs) in high-rise buildings. In terms of sheer numbers, the success of the government at organizing the ordinary people is impressive. By the end of 1973, the year when the Mutual Aid Committee Scheme was launched, a total of 1,214 Mutual Aid Committees had been set up in various buildings and residential groups, with a total household membership of some 110,380. The respective numbers increased to 1,636 and 188,022 at the end of 1974, and 2,061 and 266,601 at the end of March 1976.[25] This miraculous proliferation of MACs took place at the expense of constructing the necessary conditions for organizational vitality, notably in areas of management and resource deployment. The functions allotted to the MACs by the government were few, and they were mainly responsible for promoting the spirit of neighborly co-operation in the management of multi-storey buildings, and enabling owners and tenants to work together to improve security and cleanliness in them. The MACs were granted few resources and authority by the government, which was determined to restrict their functions and organizational scale. Consequently, mergers and the formation of federations among MACs were discouraged, thus seriously constraining their potential effectiveness as community organizations.[26] Operating under such restrictive conditions, it is small wonder that the MACs

failed to earn the support and participation of their members and constituencies.

Being sponsored and controlled by the government, and without a mass base, the MACs cannot be considered as effective community organizations performing service delivery and political integrative functions. The promotion of the MAC movement, whilst reflecting the importance attached to voluntary organizations by the government, is in the main a kind of effort at administrative penetration. Judging from current results, however, this penetrative attempt is far from successful.

Another form of administrative penetration has gradually taken shape in the late 1970s and has culminated in the publication of a Green Paper in June 1980, proposing a reform of local administration. The thrust of this proposed reform is administrative deconcentration, by which is meant that representatives of government departments will be posted in the localities and their activities will be coordinated at the local level through   management committees composed of officials. While no independent decision-making power or financial base will be granted to these local representatives, such administrative arrangements can still be expected to contribute to an improvement of administrative performance through the exposure of these representatives to local opinions and needs. However, with the erosion of the intermediate organizations and the ineffectiveness of the MACs, the increase in administrative performance stemming more additional information feedback must be minimal. The Green Paper of 1980 also proposes the establishment of District Boards which will include govern-

ment officials and unofficial members appointed from community organizations and other "active" bodies. Under this new system of local administration, the Urban Council, being an urban-area-wide body, will be so restructured that its elected members will be voted into office by an adult franchise on a district basis.[27]

As most of these reforms have not been implemented, it is difficult for us here to predict their effectiveness in depoliticizing the ordinary people of Hong Kong and to integrate them into the political system. Even though the government has so far only characterized explicitly the goal of these contemplated reforms as the enhancement of administrative efficiency, it is hard to believe that no political considerations have entered into the formulation of the reform plans. Whether as intended effects, the impact of administrative penetration on political peace can still be surmised, based on our analysis of the society of Hong Kong.

Discussion: Politicization
or Depoliticization

We have documented two coexistent processes in Hong Kong which have lead to changes in the interaction patterns between the government and the ordinary people. One process is the depletion of voluntarism, resulting in the decline of intermediate organizations with traditionalistic outlooks, and the failure to supplant them with modernist forms of intermediate organizations, especially locality organizations. The other process is the increasing assumption of service-delivery roles and functions by the government, which turns it into the major dispenser of benefits in society. The main political outcomes of these

processes are the politicization of social needs and the structural necessity of the ordinary people to approach the government for need satisfaction. The inability of the defunct intermediate organizations, which are used to be politically docile and deferential, to moderate these demands and to accommodate them within the social sector (so that they will not plague the political sector) has unleashed political demand which overload the politico-administrative apparatus. As the government has opted not to delegate resources and authority to society through nurturing indigenous social organizations and political decentralization, direct interaction between the government and the people without the mediating services of intermediate social groups is the natural outcome. Concomitant with increasing direct political contacts between the two parties is growing indiscipline on the part of the groups engaged in demand-making. In such a situation, the government has turned itself into a merely _reactive_ mechanism, not being able to direct grass-roots politics in accordance with its preference.

The government might be correct in deciding that it is politically and financially costly to resuscitate social organization and to decentralize politically. In our opinion, this option is costly _only_ in the short-run, and in the long-run it will be less expensive than the option of further administrative penetration now undertaken by the government. Our argument hinges upon an expectation that, once a viable social infrastructure has been built, it will generate a momentum of its own to provide more and more social initiative and resources to meet social needs. With the contributions of social

resources, administrative overload can be alleviated. The insertion of an intermediate layer between the government and the people will necessarily be depoliticizing, as it is comparatively easier to co-opt a limited number of local leaders into the political process than to control a huge, unruly mass of people. Political and administrative control will thus be augmented by social control. However, long-term solutions of this kind may not appeal to the limited time-span of the administration. While short-term panacea is looked for, further administrative penetration is the automatic choice.

The strategy of further administrative penetration as envisaged by the government is, in our opinion, only a lukewarm and hence ineffective attempt at depoliticization and political integration of the ordinary people. The government simply lacks the coercive means and the will to fabricate a total administrative society. As a result, the penetrative effort, though executed, does not go far enough to reach the grass-roots level. The proposed reforms in local administration, though enlarging the political arena so that more people can participate in the decision-making process, will only benefit the middle strata. The lower strata, without organizations and leaders of their own, will still be politically deprived. The introduction of adult franchise will not affect our prediction. With only limited functions, the Urban Councillors will not be able to satisfy the needs of the disadvantaged. The Urban Council election will still not be attractive enough to the ordinary folk. That an institution of election is no guarantee of political integration of the lower strata is a lessen well

borne out in the history of many developing countries.

Administrative penetration in Hong Kong, whilst not going far enough, does have the "negative" effect of bringing the government and the people closer to each other, thus further politicizing the latter. The presence of government represent-atives in the localities provides convenient targets for political demand-making. And the denial of discretionary power to local representatives will very easily transform local issues into global political disputes.

The ambivalence of the government toward both intermediate organizations and administrative decentralization has created a very fluid political arena in Hong Kong. Notably, the govern-ment is straddling between a control and an integrative approach with respect to the ordinary people. Such conflicting goals and their corresponding policy formations are detrimental to polit-ical peace, at least in the short run, which might be real long.

If, as Ambrose King has argued, administrative absorption of politics has been successful in depoliticizing Hong Kong in the past, that "past" must have seen a viable social infra-structure which was capable of containing political demands. Events in the last decade and half have exposed the limitations of this strategy. Given the limited capability of the political and administrative system, administrative absorption of politics can only be achieved when social accommodation of politics has done its job, so that only a small amount of issues are allowed to trickle through into the administrative and polit-ical realm. With the gradual collapse of social accommodation of politics, changes in the political strategy of the Hong Kong government can no longer be procrastinated.

Notes

[1] Ambrose Yeo-chi King, "Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level," _Asian Survey_, 15, 5 (May 1975), pp. 422-439.

[2] Henry Lethbridge, "The Evolution of a Chinese Voluntary Association in Hong Kong: the Po Leung Kuk," in his _Hong Kong: Stability and Change_ (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 71-103.

[3] Henry Lethbridge, "A Chinese Association in Hong Kong: The Tung Wah, " _ibid_, pp. 52-70.

[4] Henry Lethbridge, "The District Watch Committee: the Chinese Executive Council of Hong Kong," _ibid_, pp. 104-129.

[5] The most important demands for political participation taken place in Hong Kong before the Second World War were initiated by British merchants and entrepreneurs. See G.B. Endacott, _Government and People in Hong Kong 1841-1962_ (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1964), pp. 19-175.

[6] For the Kaifong Associations, see the following by Aline K. Wong: _The Kaifong Associations and the Society of Hong Kong_ (Taipei: The Orient Cultural Service, 1972); "Chinese Voluntary Associations in Southeast Asian Cities and the Kaifongs in Hong Kong," _Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society_, 11 (1971), pp. 62-73; and "Chinese Community Leadership in a Colonial Setting: The Hong Kong Neighborhood Associations," _Asian Survey_, 12, 7 (July 1972), pp. 587-601.

[7] Data on the intermediate organizations were collected by Dr. Ho Kam-fai and myself, with the help of two research assistants, in the summer of 1978. Responsible persons of the organizations were interviewed on the phone about conditions in their organizations.

[8] Angela W.S. Kan, _Implications of Concentrated Utilization of Local Facilities and Services in Public Housing Estates in Hong Kong_ (Hong Kong: Social Research Centre Occasional Paper, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, April 1975), p. 30.

[9] Hsieh Jiann, _Voluntary Associations and Cultural Continuity: A Study of the Associations of the Waichow Hakka in Hong Kong_ (Unpublished monograph in Chinese, 1979), and "Persistence and Preservation of Hakka Culture in Urban Situations: A Preliminary Study of Voluntary Associations of the Waichow Hakka in Hong Kong," (Unpublished paper, 1980).

[10] See William F. Beazer, The Commercial Future of Hong Kong (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), pp. 31-37.

[11] 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).

[12] Angela W.S. Kan, A Study of Neighborly Interaction in Public Housing: The Case of Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Social Research Centre Occasional Paper, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, June 1974).

[13] See, for example, Wong Chee-ham and Alfred Lam Chi-lai, The Social Need of Residents in Upper Ngau Tau Kok Estate, Hong Kong (in Chinese) (Hong Kong: Shue Yan College and Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council, 1974); C.K. Cheng, Towards a Better Estate Welfare Building: A Survey of Social Services in Lam Tin (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, December 1972); Leo U. Murray, Chai Wan Social Needs Study (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, September 1967); and Lee Ming-kwan, Opinion Survey on Community Facilities and Social Services in Lam Tin and Sau Mau Ping Estates (Hong Kong: Unpublished report commissioned by the Home Affairs Department, August 1978).

[14] C. K. Cheng, A Survey of Income Sources of the Member Organizations of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, May 1975); G.C.P. Riches, Urban Community Centres and Community Development: Hong Kong and Singapore (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1973); and G.C.P. Riches, Community Development in Hong Kong: Sau Mau Ping, A Case Study (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1973).

[15] The City District Officer Scheme (Hong Kong: Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, January 1969).

[16] Ambrose Yeo-chi King, 'Administrative Absorption of Politics," op. cit.

[17] Lau Siu-kai and Ho Kam-fai, "Social Accommodation of Politics: The Case of the Young Hong Kong Workers," Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, forthcoming.

[18] Compiled from the Monthly Reports on the Work of the Urban

Council and the Urban Services Department (Hong Kong: The
Urban Council), 1968-1978.

[19]Annual Report of the Umelco Office (1971), p. 1.

[20]Compiled from the 1970-1978 issues of the Annual Report of
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[21]"The Problem of Evaluating Public Opinion," South China Morn-
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[22]Ambrose Yeo-chi King, The Political Culture of Kwun Tong:
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[23]Samuel P. Huntington and Joan M. Nelson, No Easy Choice:
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Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 146.

[24]See, for example, Wayne A. Cornelius, Politics and the Migrant
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Press, 1975) and David Collier, Squatters and Oligarchs (Bal-
timore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[25]Data are compiled from the Annual Reports by the Secretary
for Home Affairs.

[26]Norman Miners, The Government and Politics of Hong Kong
(Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 172.

[27]Green Paper: A Pattern of District Administration in Hong
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