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## **Decolonization Without Independence: The Unfinished Political Reforms of the Hong Kong Government**

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**DECOLONIZATION WITHOUT INDEPENDENCE:  
THE UNFINISHED POLITICAL REFORMS OF  
THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT**

by

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The way Hong Kong is relinquished as a colony marks a distinctive departure from British decolonization policy in the past. Instead of independence, Hong Kong is going to be restored to China in 1997. This will be done despite Britain's reluctance and misgivings, and after efforts at retaining certain forms of administrative presence or political influence after the reversion of sovereignty had failed. In the remaining period of British rule, "the Government of the United Kingdom will be responsible for the administration of Hong Kong with the object of maintaining and preserving its economic and social stability; and ... the Government of the People's Republic of China will give its cooperation in this connection."<sup>1</sup>

This unprecedented way of surrendering colonial rule in British history confronts the British government with a political task which is both momentous and challenging. Instigated by a mixture of altruistic, ideological and pragmatic motives, Britain decided to introduce a series of political reforms in Hong Kong (whereas in the past significant reforms of any kind had not been made, and some had even been opposed upon their proposal) the primary concern of which was to develop a more participatory political system through devolution of power. Nevertheless, in view of the peculiar nature of Hong Kong, the general sequence of constitutional development which had in varying degrees informed political reforms in many former British colonies (consultative government -- semi-representative government -- representative government -- semi-responsible government -- responsible government/self-government -- (Dominion status) -- independence) cannot be replicated faithfully in Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup> The impossibility of independence not only means that this seemingly 'logical' sequence cannot reach its final stage, it, by interacting

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with the unique character of Hong Kong as a colonial society and the dubious applicability of past decolonizing reforms to Hong Kong (and, for that matter, to other former colonies as well) (See Appendix) would make it difficult for it even to go beyond the initial stages of this sequence.

Nevertheless, albeit with reservations, hesitancy, inconsistencies and haste, the reform proposals first broached by the Hong Kong government were obviously inspired by and reminiscent of past efforts to 'prepare' colonies for self-government (though not necessarily for independence). Within two years after the coming into force of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, however, it was obvious that Britain had backtracked and that further constitutional changes in Hong Kong could only be initiated by China or be introduced with China's blessing. Lacking the political will to confront China and increasingly aware of the threats associated with further reforms on the viability of the Hong Kong government, Britain has to all intents and purposes given up any significant reform attempt.

The abrupt termination of a reform process, strongly supported by a small group of vociferous democratic activists in Hong Kong (who deftly base their appeal on popular fear of communism), could not but produce political backlashes which appeared to have been only remotely anticipated by Britain. To escape from its political predicament, the Hong Kong government looks set on a path of political development which presupposes the primacy of the goal of maintaining a stable and sufficiently effective government. The steps that are likely to be taken in fulfilment of this primary goal will have significant political repercussions, and the course of development will in certain aspects be nondemocratic or even moderately authoritarian. It is thus ironical that political reforms which started off

in a democratic direction would, when aborted, shift to a less democratic one.

#### Impossibility of Independence as a Constraint on Political Reform

In contrast with other former British colonies, Hong Kong is a highly modernized industrial city enjoying rapid economic growth in the post-War period. On the surface of it, the high literacy rate, the pervasive influence from the West, the growing middle-class sector and economic prosperity should provide a fertile ground for the transplantation of the Westminster parliamentary government. Nevertheless, Hong Kong in the past had experienced even less constitutional advancement than other British colonies. One of the most significant factors that explain this paradox must be the decision of Britain, made known publicly in several occasions, that Hong Kong could never be independent because of its smallness, the opposition from China and the fact that even though a small part of Hong Kong was ceded to Britain permanently by the moribund Manchu regime in the nineteenth century, the bulk of the land area of Hong Kong has to be returned to China upon the expiry of a lease in 1997. In addition, in the past no nationalist demand for independence had even been made by the people of Hong Kong. The absence of nationalist agitation and the widespread acquiescence of the populace reflect the unique nature of Hong Kong as a colony. Hong Kong was wrung by force from China not out of a desire of Britain for territorial gain or for the natural resources that Hong Kong could offer. Rather it was the goal of Britain to obtain a foothold close to China which would allow her to develop Far East trade. Accordingly, Hong Kong as a barren and virtually nonpopulated island was turned into a British colony. Unlike other British colonies, a colonial government was first set up in

Hong Kong before the arrival of the colonial people. In order to attract Chinese people to Hong Kong, particularly those with higher social status, colonial rule had perforce to be enlightened and benign even though colonial institutions looked otherwise. The Chinese people who moved to Hong Kong since the establishment of the colony came primarily for economic betterment or avoidance of political turmoil and persecution. They did not come to Hong Kong to launch a nationalist movement to topple colonial rule, particularly when the alternative to it was rule by the authoritarian Nationalist or Communist regimes. Consequently, up until the Sino-British negotiation over the future of Hong Kong, Hong Kong was governed formally in the most typical colonial fashion. Power was concentrated in the Governor, who acted as the plenipotentiary of the Crown. He was advised by the Executive and Legislative Councils (both appointed by him), but there was no legal obligation that he had to abide by their recommendations. In spite of the dignified position of the two Councils in the constitution of Hong Kong, in reality the government was a 'pure' bureaucratic government, where career officials, unhampered by forces coming from society, exercised autonomous power. (Incidentally, the society under colonial rule is atomistic and politically unorganized.)

Up till 1982, the elective principle as a means to recruit political leaders was not operative in Hong Kong. The only exception, though politically insignificant, was the partially elected Urban Council which was granted a small bunch of municipal functions.<sup>3</sup> The presence of some elected politicians did occasionally embarrass the government, as a few of them did assume an inflated political role as the popular leader of the people.

The impossibility of ultimate independence had before 1982 precluded the transfer of the Westminster model to Hong Kong or the need

to 'prepare' for it.<sup>4</sup> The only significant proposals for reform in the post-War period (in 1946 and 1966) came in the form of municipal councils,<sup>5</sup> which had been rejected by Britain as a way of constitutional advancement for her smaller colonies elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, even these moderate reforms were eventually not adopted. The reasons for their abandonment revealed tellingly the constraints on political reform exerted by the impossibility of independence and all its implications. For it was largely the fear of opposition from China and the infiltration of pro-Communist elements into the government that cautioned both the government and the Westernized Chinese elites against even moderate reforms. Naturally, the fear of social and political instability produced by electoral politics (based only on a restricted franchise) also played a part in the strangulation of these early reform attempts.<sup>7</sup>

After the signing of the Joint Declaration, the absence of the prospect of independence looms even larger as a constraint on political reform. Now the successor regime is very much concerned with the 'content' or 'substance' of the sovereignty that it will eventually possess. China is not likely to see with magnanimity a returned sovereignty devoid of much substance as power has already been devolved to the people which can only be retrieved with difficulty.<sup>8</sup>

More specifically, the impossibility of independence as a constraint on reform makes its impact on several areas: the opposition to or even subversion of the reform by China and her supporters in Hong Kong (China's ascendant influence and her organizational presence in Hong Kong is beyond doubt), the difficulty of garnering support for the reforms when they are seen as only temporary arrangements and the difficulty of locating suitable collaborators to whom power can be transferred.

The reasons why China is opposed to political democratization (or, in the often-used terms of the Hong Kong government, 'the development of representative government') by Britain are legion:<sup>9</sup> (1) the fear that Britain will use it as an excuse to shirk its responsibility of administering Hong Kong until 1997, (2) democratization will release political forces of such magnitudes that continued rule of the Hong Kong government will be difficult or impossible, (3) the injection of elements of uncertainty which would wreck the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong before China is in a position to take over, (4) the possibility that power will be transferred to political groups which are pro-Britain, hostile to China or predisposed to place the interests of Hong Kong before those of China, (5) China being compelled to openly organize politically in order to participate in the competition for the transferred power, thus bringing about detrimental consequences for Hong Kong, (6) democratization will disrupt the capitalist system of Hong Kong by scaring away local and foreign capital and by forcing the government to adopt excessive welfare measures and restrictive economic regulations, (7) the possibility of turning mass elections into occasions for the people of Hong Kong to periodically pass judgments on the popularity of China, and (8) the fear that the 'democratic forces' in Hong Kong will eventually become subversive of political tranquility in China by sheer demonstration effects and by their purposive promotion of Western-style 'democracy' in China. This list of reasons are by no means exhaustive, but they suffice to severely qualify the political formula of 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong', which has been promised by China as a solution to its long-term future. After all, what is unequivocally specified in the formula is that the future government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) will be formed by the local people. The

way this government will be formed and the channels of political recruitment are however obscure and subject to diverse interpretations.

Not sure of Britain's intentions and unable to completely prevent some forms of power transfer from taking place, China for strategic reasons and out of an instinctual predisposition not to leave power to chance, feels compelled to compete in any power-grasping game.<sup>10</sup> In doing so China commands an overwhelmingly advantaged position because it is the future master of Hong Kong. As the new center of political gravity in Hong Kong, China is beginning to eclipse the authority of the incumbent government. Extending out from its official and unofficial organizations in Hong Kong, China has not only been able to attract to its side, and to create on its own, an increasing number of local leaders and organizations who are prepared to toe the line of China out of a multitude of motives (patriotism, expediency, selfishness or sheer power-worship), but China has also proven itself capable of 'penetrating' into the quasi-political bodies established by the Hong Kong government as the prop of colonial rule. Accordingly, the emergence of a 'dual' authority structure raises a great probability that, with time, power transferred by the departing government will be increasingly deposited in the hands of China rather than controlled by those favored by the British. While this scenario eventually is not avoidable, Britain would certainly be in no mood to speed up its appearance.

The coexistence of both the incumbent and future political masters makes it impossible to groom successors to her liking by Britain. The selection of collaborators in the decolonization process and grooming them into future rulers after the withdrawal of the colonial power had been standard practices of Britain.

As Wasserman (1976: 174)\* has suggested, decolonization consisted of two apparently contradictory processes. The first, the more discontinuous and visible, was the withdrawal of direct colonial authority by the metropole. This process involved a dramatic change of regime - a change in political institutions and in patterns of recruitment into decision-making roles. This was the process of democratization. Wasserman argues that this first process must be understood in terms of the second, which was characterized by continuity and consisted of the preservation of the colonial political economy and the integration of an indigenous elite into positions of authority in a way that would protect the economic and strategic interests of the metropole.<sup>11</sup>

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\* Wasserman, Gary. 1976. *Politics of Decolonization: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue 1960-1965*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

In order to facilitate the rise and dominance of her favored indigenous elite, Britain might go as far as debarring the 'ineligibles' from entering into the political arena.<sup>12</sup>

For a variety of reasons, the exercise of grooming successor elites failed in many British colonies not long after their independence, as the victorious nationalist faction was unable to consolidate its power as a ruling group. What is pertinent here however is that Britain has even no chance to groom her own favored successors in Hong Kong as she is now confronted by an unprecedented situation. In a way the Hong Kong government is to be blamed for their past neglect, so that at the eve of the Sino-British negotiation, Hong Kong did not have a local leadership with organizational linkage to the masses. But what is of greater significance is the magnetic effect of the Chinese center of political gravity on the 'potential' elite that might 'normally' be groomed by the British. Not only are newly-arising leaders short in supply, but Britain cannot even be certain about the allegiance of her own supporters,

as not a few of them are gingerly and meticulously playing the juggling act so as to maximize their chances with both political masters. In the run-up to 1997, Britain has to face the miserable fate of being a solitary and declining power, surrounded by people affiliated in varying degrees with the future political master.

Without the prospect of independence and confronted with the strident opposition from China, it would be difficult for the constitutional changes initiated by Britain to have popular appeal, for it is always that these reforms would be dismantled later and that those who ardently support them would suffer from political reprisal afterwards. While earlier on concepts derived from past decolonization experience had been bandied by the Hong Kong government and some of its supporters (such as the ministerial system and two-party system), they hardly aroused public enthusiasm apart from raising the aspirations of a small group of democratic activists. Without widespread and determined public support, the transfer of institutions can only have a dim chance of success.

Nor is that all. By being bound by international agreement to be responsible for the administration of Hong Kong until 1997, yet under declining authority and in anticipation of increasing difficulties, Britain cannot do without the support of China in the governance of the place. The support from China is critical in at least several areas if effective and stable rule is to be maintained in the transitional period: (1) public policies devised by the Hong Kong government whose acceptance and success would be contingent upon the declared commitment of China after 1997, (2) policies and actions that require the active cooperation of China, (3) prevention of the occurrence of a situation where China, at loggerheads with Britain, would support actions against the government by some sections of the public, and (4) the need to bolster the authority



of the government by the overwhelming power of China.

The absence of the prospect of independence in essence renders inapplicable the past decolonization procedures of Britain. Of equal, if not more, importance is the social-economic peculiarities of the Hong Kong society, which distinguish it as a very different entity from Britain's former colonies. In several critical aspects this uniqueness poses as an impediment to the introduction of 'democratic' political reforms in Hong Kong. And it reinforces the already potent impact of the impossibility of independence.

#### Socio-Economic Peculiarities of Hong Kong as a Colony

Decolonization in the former British colonies in the post-War era was largely forced upon her by the fervent nationalist movement, which galvanized almost all sectors of the colonial people into an anti-colonial campaign. The backdrop of the eruption of nationalist sentiments were largely the oppressive aspects of colonialism. (The indignities suffered by the colonial powers in the life-and-death struggles among themselves, the military defeat inflicted on them by the Japanese and their desperate reliance on the support and sacrifice of the colonial people to fight a total war also played a part in fomenting self-assertiveness among the colonized.)

In contrast with former British colonies (and in fact all former colonies), the historical juncture where British felt obligated to embark upon a decolonization program in Hong Kong was one where nationalism was a fading force. The grievances that fed nationalist movements in other British colonies -- ethnic discrimination, economic underdevelopment, meagre opportunities for upward social mobility and poverty of the masses -- are not to be found, or found in only a mild form, in Hong Kong. Nationalism as a principle or an ideology also fails to find a

sufficiently large audience there because the people have subscribed to colonial rule voluntarily. They are aware of the transience of colonial status and know that China can take over the place at any time. There is also of course the understanding that the denouement of a nationalist outburst would be Communist takeover. Without the intense pressure of a nationalist movement, the pace and content of decolonization orchestrated by Britain in Hong Kong naturally will be determined by considerations which have little to do with the imperative need to cater to nationalist demands. It turns out that these considerations would eventually point to a different mode of decolonization in Hong Kong.

In the past, both decolonization and nationalism had strong democratic implications, and hence both were essentially processes of democratization. By the same token, the push for democratization in the former British colonies was sustained and reinforced by the overarching nationalist movement and other movements encompassed by it: movements for independence, ethnic equality, economic development and cultural self-respect. The democratic movement gained force precisely because it was part of a larger, all-encompassing nationalist movement.

In Hong Kong, colonial rule as a school of democracy and the process of modernization have indeed given birth to a small group of democratic activists, who had registered their demand for democracy long before the appearance the 1997 issue but who gained momentum only lately primarily due to the new political situation created by the scheduled departure of Britain, the intention of Britain to develop 'representative government' and the promise of China to allow the people of Hong Kong to govern themselves. The new situation even allows them to magnify their appeal for democracy by upholding it as a means to 'withstand communism or Communist China'. Despite these seemingly

propitious conditions, the democratic activists however have not been able so far to force both the British and Chinese governments to accede to their demand for far-reaching democratic reforms, nor have they been successful in launching a democratic movement with mass participation. This failure of the democratic activities is of course explicable in terms of the opposition of China, the power of the pro-China elements in Hong Kong and the hesitancy and reservations of Britain about political reform. But a significant reason must be sought from the peculiar socio-economic character of Hong Kong society, which makes it extremely difficult to mobilize support for a large-scale democratic movement. Consequently, the democratic movement in Hong Kong can only be a solitary, isolated and small-scale movement. It is a movement that is led and participated primarily by middle-class intellectuals and professionals who lack sufficient organizational linkage or affective rapport with the common people. It is thus unavoidable that the role of the democratic activists is primarily the negative one of undermining and discrediting existing authorities (e.g. by selective interpretation of issues, public policies and decisions, and events, and by articulating unrealistic demands) through the highly developed and (largely) free mass media, where can be found a large contingent of young, idealistic and radicalized reporters and commentators. Overplaying the negative role, nevertheless, cannot compensate for the lack of political organization and power of the democratic activists. It might eventually backfire to the detriment of the credibility of the mass media. What is more serious is that it might even lead to psychological fatigue or aversion among an audience who are preoccupied with order and stability.

The masses, despite their apprehension about the future and mistrust of China, are in a state of political lethargy out of a sense of

defeatism, powerlessness and aversion to politics.<sup>13</sup> They also suspect the motives of the 'leaders' in Hong Kong<sup>14</sup> and are skeptical about their political influence. Besides, they are quite satisfied with the status quo and supportive of the existing political system.<sup>15</sup> They do not see the relevance of democratic changes to their self-interests. Not a few of them are on the contrary worried that democratic reforms will place what they now have in jeopardy.

It is the opposition of the indigenous bourgeoisie and the middle classes to the democratization part of decolonization that dooms the movement of the democratic activists. Even though opposition to democratic reform coming from the indigenous bourgeoisie had been encountered in other British colonies, particularly from those who "recognize the fragility of their control locally and the interest they well may have in a European connection"<sup>16</sup>. But in other British colonies the indigenous bourgeoisie as a class was tiny and weak. They were dominated by the economic interests of the colonial power or even by those of other foreign minorities (e.g. the Asians in East Africa). Their opposition to the nationalist movement hence did not pose a formidable obstacle to the nationalist movement. Oftentimes the indigenous bourgeoisie found it politically advantageous in joining forces with the nationalists to form a united anti-colonial front. As described succinctly by Emerson,

The Western-trained intelligentsia and professional men were usually joined by the rising indigenous entrepreneurs and businessmen, as in India or in West Africa where the women traders must be included as well. Aside from other inducements to enlist in the nationalist cause, the local businessman was likely to find, or at least to be persuaded that he had found, his way blocked by Western economic interests which, better equipped with capital and the techniques of modern trade and enterprise, could also draw upon the support of the imperial and colonial governments.<sup>17</sup>

The desire of indigenous economic interests for more whole-hearted and extensive governmental support led them to make important financial contributions to the nationalist movements in India and some other countries.<sup>18</sup>

The indigenous bourgeoisie in Hong Kong is a totally different situation. The 'indigenoussness' of the bourgeoisie of Hong Kong must be qualified by the fact that their predecessors came from outside (from China (such as the Shanghainese entrepreneurs) or from other advanced countries). While they have established roots in Hong Kong, the roots are by no means deep. Cosmopolitanism, a-nationalism, rationalism and predatoriness are the hallmarks of the indigenous bourgeoisie of Hong Kong. Intent on making profits and fully aware of the impossibility of controlling ultimate political power, they are willing to rely on the protection of the colonial government to provide a favorable environment for profit-making. (And this dependent disposition towards an authoritarian government is also to a certain extent shared by foreign capitalists.) In this aspect they have not been disappointed by the colonial government, whose professed doctrine of 'positive non-interventionism' has enabled the economy of Hong Kong to prosper. The indigenous capitalists are by now a formidable force which even the colonial government has to reckon with, for its interests are closely tied in with theirs. The dependent nature of the Hong Kong economy (dependent on foreign capital, markets and technology), and the need to maintain a competitive investment environment of low tax rate, minimal government regulation and labor quiescence have convinced the local bourgeoisie that an authoritarian government is indispensable to the economic viability of Hong Kong. Democratization feeds into the sense of political impotency of the indigenous capitalists and creates a feeling of panic. In addition to serving notice to the

government on their opposition to democratization,<sup>19</sup> they also seek out China as their 'protector', knowing full well of their indispensability to the success of capitalist Hong Kong in the 'one country, two systems' model. As expected, the promise of protection comes promptly from China, who is eager to assuage their fears. In the mind of the local bourgeoisie, it is more expedient to rely on the all-powerful Chinese government to fulfil the promise of maintaining capitalism in Hong Kong (if China reneges on her promise, they are always free to leave) than to work with the weak and splintered local democratic activists who are presumed to be unsympathetic to business interests, prone to court the wrath of China and, in their search for social and economic justice, bound to play havoc with the economy. Since the Sino-British Agreement, the bargaining, or more appropriately, the veto power of the local bourgeoisie has steeply increased because of the internationalization (and hence the mobility) of local capital (due to worldwide diversification of investment by local capitalists and growing proportion of them now holding foreign passports or rights of residence), the looming economic difficulties facing Hong Kong because of the gradual withdrawal of local capital and the increasing threats of international protectionism. Moreover, in their fight against democratization, the local capitalists find an ally also in foreign capital, whose sole interest in Hong Kong is as a place to invest.

Another peculiar aspect of the weakness of the democratic movement in Hong Kong is the deplorable fact that, even though the middle class elements (intellectuals, lawyers, teachers, journalists, social workers, religious workers) provide the leadership for the movement, they fail to receive support from their own ranks. For one thing, through education and exposure to the workings of the western democracies, the middle

classes in Hong Kong, like their counterparts in other developing countries, cherish democratic ideals and practices. Another thing is that it is almost a general rule that middle classes all over the world are inclined in varying degrees to participate in politics in order to achieve their goals, be they public-serving or self-regarding. A few examples from other places will make this 'need' for 'democracy' clear. In pre-independence Sierra Leone,

[s]tripped to its essentials, the anti-colonial nationalism that emerged after world war I was merely the ideological projection of the expanding appetite of middle class Africans for new jobs and related perquisites which only the government could provide. Inevitably, this nationalism confronted the sizable expatriate personnel, who claimed the most desirable posts in the colonial establishment, as the main barrier to its goal. This barrier, it was soon discovered, could be overcome only with the demise of the colonial regime itself. Hence the anti-colonial orientation of African nationalism.<sup>20</sup>

In the United States, collective choice made through the democratic procedure is a way of getting everyone else to subsidize the 'new' middle class, as stated satirically by Wildavsky:<sup>21</sup>

So let us assume that America's new class has money (though not the most money) but not corresponding status or power. Its defining existential condition is that high income and professional standing alone do not enable its members to maintain the status and privilege to which they aspire. Their money cannot buy them what they want; so their task, as they define it, is to convince others to pay collectively for what they cannot obtain individually. Thus government lies at the center of their aspirations and operations.

However, if the status quo is favorable to middle class interests, they will then become its staunch supporter, however 'undemocratic' it is. In Latin America, for instance, "the political alliances of the middle

classes will depend on whether or not the social system proves capable of satisfying their minimum aspirations. Where that satisfaction is provided, the middle sectors will be likely to seek alliance with the powerful and privileged groups in the community, and will thus contribute to the maintenance of the existing order".<sup>22</sup> The orientation of the middle classes in Hong Kong is basically similar of that in Latin America, but in an even more exaggerated form. The middle classes in Hong Kong have grown rapidly since the early 1970s, as a concomitant of the take-off of the economy. Since they still constitute only a small segment in a pyramidal class structure, their self-esteem and self-importance are grossly overblown. They have witnessed only a mild and diminishing form of ethnic discrimination in public employment, but that pales into insignificance when the grass in the private sector has grown even 'greener'. Of most importance in molding the social character of the middle classes are: that they do not find their path of upward social mobility blocked by an entrenched and closed upper class and that most of the middle class people have experienced upward mobility and rapid improvement of their standard of living within their lifetime. Naturally, the existing system is inordinately advantageous to them, and any proposal to restructure it is threatening.

To the middle classes, 'equality of opportunity' is thus not an ideal to be attained in the future but a living reality and the sine qua non of Hong Kong's success. Such belief in and dedication to individual assertion, merit and equal participation have molded the middle-class people into extreme individualists. The middle sector is by nature heterogenous (a result of diversity of social and economic origins and interests), hence its highly fragmented character. This prevents the formation of a compact social stratum constituting a bloc for purposes of

political action. Consequently, "the political problem posed by these people is not so much what the direction may be as whether they will take any direction at all."<sup>23</sup>

The attitude of the middle classes to the masses is one of snob-bishness. Poverty is readily explained away as individual failures and should not be corrected by public welfare and assistance, the costs of which would have to be born by the self-reliant middle classes.<sup>24</sup> The intervention of the government to reduce social and economic inequalities will backfire, constrict equality of opportunities and dampen individual incentives. These attitudes, together with the absence of a need to ally with the masses to 'struggle against' a closed upper class, make the middle sector skeptical about democratic reforms.

The middle classes in Hong Kong are also a dependent stratum. They are dependent, due to the impossibility of independence for Hong Kong, on the colonial government for protection, and on both the government and the capitalists for employment. Because of the openness of Hong Kong society, successful capitalists are seen as those in the middle classes who have 'made it' much better than others. Instead of seeing the capitalists as an alien social entity whose interests are in conflict with theirs, they see them as but extensions of themselves and with whom they are proud to identify. This mentality reinforces the political conservatism of the middle classes. Moreover, as a significant component of the middle class sector is made up of civil servants, whose interests are bound up with those of the colonial government, the political lethargy of the middle classes is reinforced.<sup>25</sup>

The politically and economically dependent middle sector is basically materialistic, hedonistic, individualistic, snobbish, in many ways authoritarian, privatistic and self-seeking. It is organizationally and ideologically

fragmented. Even the democratic activists are not immune from these middle class 'diseases', which are reflected in the timidity and disunity of their democratic movement. Despite their deep-seated fear of communism, they have failed to unite into a militant political force. On the contrary, they are in the throes of organizational and psychological disarray. In the typical style of the Hong Kong middle classes, the most sought after solution to the 1997 malaise (viz. emigration) is individualistic in nature.

#### Political Reform in Hong Kong: Advance and Retreat

Even though fundamental political reforms had not been undertaken before 1982, Britain had in the past built up an elaborate system of consultation with expert and public opinion, which was made up of a large number of advisory committees. This system had been successful in co-opting the Chinese elite into the governmental structure and in allowing the government to formulate reasonable policies.<sup>26</sup>

The 1997 issue changed the situation. Whereas in the past, political innovations represented 'change within tradition',<sup>27</sup> incremental changes are no longer sufficient to cope with the new environment. Despite reservations and past failures, Britain at first was undaunted and announced, during the negotiation over Hong Kong's future, that a package of political reforms would be introduced stage by stage. There seemed to be a number of reasons for such a hasty move: to transfer power to the Hong Kong people so that they could stand up against China after 1997, sweetening the Sino-British deal over Hong Kong for the British Parliament by a promise to 'democratize', the need to share power with the ruled so that their support could be obtained in the difficult transitional period ahead, the imperative to buttress the declining authority of a departing government, and possibly to enlist public opinion as a ploy to bargain with

China. The reforms suggested in the earliest reform proposals, listed in the 1984 Green Paper, were grandiose. The main aim of the reforms smacked of development into 'self-government': "to develop progressively a system of government the authority for which is firmly rooted in Hong Kong, which is able to represent authoritatively the views of the people of Hong Kong, and which is more directly accountable to the people of Hong Kong".<sup>28</sup> The path of constitutional development as suggested in the Green Paper is reminiscent of the 'theory of preparation' for the Westminster model, which involves the aggrandizement of the legislature as the center of power and the source of legitimacy for other subordinate institutions. As summarized in the Green Paper:<sup>29</sup>

#### The Legislative Council

- (a) Arrangements should be introduced to provide for a substantial number of Unofficial members of the Legislative Council to be elected indirectly -
  - (i) by an electoral college composed of all members of the Urban Council, the New Regional Council and the District Boards [will be discussed later], and
  - (ii) by specified functional constituencies.
- (b) A number of appointed Unofficial members should be retained on the Council, for the time being.
- (c) The number of Official members of the Council should be gradually reduced.
- (d) To start with, these arrangements should be introduced in two stages—in 1985 and 1988 - following the District Board elections in those years.
- (e) The composition of the Legislative Council by 1988 should be -
  - (i) 12 Unofficial members elected by electoral college,
  - (ii) 12 Unofficial members elected by the functional constituencies,
  - (iii) 16 appointed Unofficial members, and
  - (iv) 10 Official members.
- (f) in 1989, after the 1988 elections to the Council have taken place, there should be a review of the position with a view to deciding what further developments should be pursued.

#### The Executive Council . . .

- (g) The majority of the appointed Unofficial members of the Executive Council should be replaced progressively by members elected by the Unofficial members of the Legislative Council from among their number, but a small number of members should continue to be appointed by the Governor and the four ex-officio members should remain as members of the Council.
- (h) These arrangements should be introduced in two stages - in 1988 and 1991 - following the elections to the Legislative Council in those years.
- (i) The eventual composition of the Executive Council by 1991 should be -
  - (i) at least 8 members elected by the Unofficial members of the Legislative Council,
  - (ii) 2 members appointed by the Governor, and
  - (iii) 4 ex-officio members, although these members might be modified in the light of the review of the position of the Legislative Council in 1989.

#### The Governor . . .

- (j) In due course, the Governor should be replaced as President of the Legislative Council by a Presiding Officer elected by the Unofficial members of the Legislative Council after their own number. This change might be introduced in two stages.

Of even more momentous importance is the hint embedded in the Green Paper as to the possible change in the way the Governor was to be selected: "The future method of selecting candidates for appointment as Governor will also need to be considered. One possible development would be for the Governor himself, in his capacity as Chief Executive, to be selected, once the process described in this Paper is complete, through an elective process, for example, through election by a college composed of all Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils after a period of consultation among them".<sup>30</sup>

The process of constitutional development charted out by Green

Paper, if completed, will definitely bring about fundamental transformation of the political system of Hong Kong. A quasi-Westminster apparatus will have been in place immediately before the Chinese takeover. This 'sneak attack' by the British, as China perceived it, alarmed and incensed her. But the democratic activists were not satisfied and complained about the sluggishness of the pace of reforms. The motives behind Britain's scheme to lay before the people of Hong Kong a long-term plan for constitutional development were difficult to gauge. Britain might have over-estimated the political need to seek the support of the people of Hong Kong for the forthcoming Sino-British Agreement; or she might aim at producing a fait accompli for China which would make disavowal of it difficult; or yet it might simply be a rash and ill-conceived decision of the British officials, over the head of the Hong Kong government, to replicate the past pattern of constitutional reform in Hong Kong. In any event, due to some obvious reasons (e.g. those obstacles to reform discussed before which were in part tacitly admitted in the Green Paper in its concern with 'instability' produced by 'adversarial politics'<sup>31</sup>) and some inexplicable ones, Britain suddenly underwent an abrupt turnabout. In the White Paper,<sup>32</sup> issued several months later, Britain undertook the first strategic retreat in her political reform 'offensive'. While some concessions were made to the democratic activists, the determination to institute medium- and long-term reforms effectively evaporated. Concessions were made by speeding up some short-term reforms: (1) Instead of the 12 indirectly elected unofficial members of the Legislative Council (divided equally between the electoral college and the functional constituencies) proposed for 1985, the number was increased to 24 (with equal numbers for the two electoral modes). (2) The number of appointed unofficial members in 1985 would be reduced

by one, from the 23 originally proposed to 22, thus providing for a larger number of elected unofficial members than appointed unofficial members. (3) The number of official members would be ten in 1985 instead of 13 in the Green Paper. (4) The review of the development of the 'representative government' would be brought forward to 1987, in lieu of 1989 as proposed before. (All these reforms were duly implemented in 1985.) However, no definite promise was made as to future reforms.

What is glaring in the White Paper is the evident retreat by Britain. The enthusiasm for direct election, not strong in the beginning, was smoldered. The White Paper found that "[t]here was considerable general public concern that too rapid progress toward direct election could place the future stability and prosperity of Hong Kong in jeopardy. In summary, there was strong public support for the idea of direct elections but little support for such elections in the immediate future".<sup>33</sup> Plans to tamper with the composition of the Executive Council was suspended. The proposal for a ministerial system was shelved. There was no intention to change the role of the Governor nor the mode of his selection. From the silence of the White Paper on future reforms, it can be gathered that Britain had discarded any intention to initiate further reforms.

The hint for the British retreat was already suggested in the White Paper. Note the following sentence from the White Paper: "Since the Green Paper was published the Draft Agreement on the Future of Hong Kong has been initialled in Peking. Any proposals for change in the position and role of the Governor will need to take into account the provisions of the Joint Declaration and these important issues will be considered at the later stage."<sup>34</sup>

Since the implementation of the proposals of the White Paper, measures had been taken by China to take over the initiative in political reform. There was a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, China made explicit its objection to any attempt by the Britain to turn the legislature into a center of real power and subordinate all other political and administrative institutions to it. To do so would be interpreted as an infringement of China's sovereignty over Hong Kong. Britain was asked to abandon any plans for further reforms until China's design for the future political system was made known, or unless they facilitated the 'convergence' between the present and future systems, and only if they were endorsed by China.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, China immediately went into the drafting of the Basic Law -- the future constitution of the Hong Kong SAR. The first draft of it will be available in 1988. The Basic Law drafting process provides the locus for the conservative forces in Hong Kong to congeal. Conservative forces were mobilized -- particularly among business groups -- to oppose 'premature' democratization by the Hong Kong government. In the meantime, China embarked upon an offensive and, through formal and informal channels, made known its intentions, or at least its reservations (particularly about party politics, direct elections and legislative hegemony), for the future political system of Hong Kong. As things stand, the political system in the future will be one centering upon a powerful chief executive, who will be independent of the elected legislature and will be checked by it only to a limited degree.<sup>36</sup>

The strategic offensive to pre-empt the initiative of political reform had landed Britain into a serious dilemma. To conform to China's intentions would erode the credibility of the Hong Kong government, which had already been ridiculed as a lame-duck. To do otherwise would

run the risks of antagonizing China and having the reforms dismantled after 1997. Besides, given all the impediments to transferring a quasi-Westminster system to Hong Kong and the low probability of its successful operation, Britain did not really have too much confidence in her reform plans. At the end, the preponderant British interests in promoting long-term diplomatic and economic relationship with China took precedence. The statements by various British and Hong Kong officials all pointed to one direction: surrendering the reform initiative to China and playing the secondary role of preparing Hong Kong for the future system stipulated in the Basic Law.<sup>37</sup> The government even went to the extent of saying that the role or mode of selection of the Executive Council and the Governor would not be included in the 1987 review.<sup>38</sup> It is also doubtful that direct elections of part of the Legislative Councillors will be held in 1988.

While the plan to transform the viceregal structure of Hong Kong into a parliamentary government has been virtually abandoned, Britain was still able to introduce reforms in some less important areas which occasionally drew the suspicion and disapproval of China. However, these reforms were ad hoc, desultory and disconnected efforts, even though the overall direction was to open up further the political system. Some of the more important changes that have been made or will be introduced subsequently are:

(1) the Hong Kong Act 1985, enacted by the British Parliament immediately after the signing of the Sino-British Agreement, was an Act to make provision for and in connection with the ending of British sovereignty and jurisdiction over Hong Kong. Section 3(1) of the Act reads: "Her Majesty may before the relevant date by Order in Council make such provision as appears to Her Majesty to be necessary or



expedient in consequence of or in connection with the provisions of section 1(1) of this Act - (a) for repealing or amending any enactment so far as it is part of the law of Hong Kong; and (b) for enabling the legislature of Hong Kong to repeal or amend any enactment so far as it is part of that law and so to make laws having extra-territorial operation." Thus, through delegation of authority by the British Crown from time to time, the legislative power of the Legislative Council will be enhanced.

(2) bolstering the power and status of the Legislative Council by enacting the controversial Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance in 1985. The ordinance, among other things, empowers the Legislative Council or a standing committee thereof to "order any person to attend before the Council or before such committee and to give evidence or to produce any paper, book, record or document in the possession or under the control of such person."<sup>39</sup> Even though the enlarged investigative power of the legislature is in some ways circumscribed, it still constitutes a potentially powerful weapon for the legislature in its relationship with the Governor.

(3) two indirectly elected Legislative Councillors were appointed to the Executive Council in 1986.<sup>40</sup> Though they are accountable to the Governor only, this move represented a strengthening of relationship between the 'closed' Executive Council and the elective elements in the legislature.

(4) Legislative Councillors were more frequently appointed to consultative or advisory committees in an attempt to boost their status and influence.

(5) Steps have been taken to make the judiciary more independent of the government by drawing up judicial service regulations which will replace civil service regulations for judicial officers.<sup>42</sup>

(6) Immediately before their inauguration of the Sino-British negotiation over the future of Hong Kong, in a move reminiscent of the steps taken in former British colonies to use local bodies as the training ground of future leaders, eighteen (later nineteen) district boards were set up which were charged with consultative functions and had a partially elected membership. In 1985 the elective component was subsequently enlarged to two-thirds of the membership, and the chairmen of the boards also became elective.

(7) At the semi-local level, there were the restructuring of the half-elected Urban Council and the establishment of a largely similar Regional Council in the New Territories. (It is possible that the Regional Council was originally conceived as an alternative to the introduction of an elective component in the Legislative Council, which, however quickly followed.)

(8) Perhaps the most uncontroversial reform undertaken is the localization of the civil service, which is in fact a continuation of a past trend. The quickened pace of localization draws protestations from expatriate civil servants, which however is unavoidable. Starting from mid-1985, the government has stopped hiring expatriates for the elite administrative officers grade of the civil service.<sup>43</sup> Retirement age for expatriates was set at 57, and it was projected that by 1996, only three of the secretarial posts (equivalent to ministerial posts in other countries) out of a total of 18 (the figure for 1986) would be held by expatriates.<sup>44</sup> In 1986, "[i]n the senior management/professional grades, local officers now hold over 70 per cent of the 1,500 posts whilst in directorate (i.e. most senior) ranks, the proportion has reached 50 per cent of the 940 positions."<sup>45</sup>

### The Politics of Unfinished Reforms

The injection of new elements inevitably creates conflicts in the political system. Nevertheless, if the direction of change is clear and unalterable, and if the steps taken are appropriate and integrated, conflicts stemming from political reforms will only be temporary, for the old elements will be compelled to reconcile themselves to the emerging political order. Such, however, is not the case in Hong Kong. In the first place, with all the obstacles encountered in the reform process and the obvious reservations and vacillations of Britain, the initial reforms were largely ad hoc, incremental, disconnected and reactive extemporizations.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the sudden abortion of the reforms not long after they had been installed made it unnecessary and impossible for the new and old elements to reconcile with one another, for without an ineluctable direction of change, no one is sure who would eventually be the loser. Thus, the aborted reforms of the British, instead of propelling the political system of Hong Kong toward a Westminster direction, in actuality turn a previously 'harmonious' system (however contrived the 'harmony' may be) into a conflict-laden one, which inordinately complicates the efforts of Britain to maintain a stable and effective government in her last decade of rule over Hong Kong.

Since the onset of the Sino-British negotiation, the Hong Kong government has found itself in a 'turbulent' environment,<sup>47</sup> which severely taxed its will and ability to govern. This turbulence is caused by a number of factors: the mistrust of China, the growing seriousness of social, political and economic problems, the volatility of public opinion, the unsettling feelings of pessimism and uncertainty, the rise of new political groups, the politicization of many socio-economic groups, the rivalries among these groups, the increasing resort to confrontational

tactics to pressurize the government, the increasing sensitivity of the people to the conflict or potential conflict of interests between Hong Kong on the one hand and China or Britain on the other, as well as between the people and their government, and the increasing employment of populist appeals and oppositional tactics by the aggrieved and frustrated 'politicians' and leaders.

At a time of unprecedented turbulence, the power and resources at the disposal of the government are at their lowest point ever. The political autonomy of the government has been seriously curtailed by the entry of China and Britain into the decision-making arena. Never before has the government's discretion been so constricted. Now it finds itself closely monitored by two superior governments whose interests it cannot ignore and whose support it cannot do without. The situation of the government is made even more difficult by the natural tendency for the people of Hong Kong to bypass it and seek directly the support of the British or the Chinese governments, particularly the latter. Even without the intrusion of Britain and China into the political scene, a departing government is bound to witness decline in authority. Various individuals and groups will become much bolder in challenging its authority. A transitional government is also victimized by a 'telescoping' process which leads the people to perceive it as the mistrusted future SAR government and to deal with it accordingly (for instance, to 'purify' it in a democratic direction by ridding it of its authoritarian powers so that they will not fall into the hands of the future government). The result is that the government will become increasingly hamstrung, in the process of policy formulation and implementation, by popular suspicions and objections, thus further undermining its increasingly tenuous authority and its ability to take decisive actions.

The hastily introduced reforms have aggravated the problem of 'ungovernability'. Instead of mobilizing support for the battered government, they have implanted a number of paralyzing contradictions into the political system which it is unable to control or to resolve. The formerly 'harmonious' system, centering on the Governor as the source of authority and legitimacy, has broken down, and in its place is a conflict-ridden, dissension-prone system, whose components base their power and influence on divergent, incompatible principles.

The gist of the matter is that the reforms undertaken by the Hong Kong government has, in an effort to pacify a variety of constituencies and in an attempt to politicize the vested interests so that they can fend for themselves in a new political game, so fragmented and dispersed the power it has devolved to the people (through a system of indirect elections by functional constituencies and local bodies) that a large number of political forces, all individually weak, have been unleashed. The resultant confusion can be testified to by the intensifying elite rivalries, polarization of opinions and increasing deployment of unconventional tactics to score political points. While the bulk of political power is still in the possession of the government, its declining authority position however would caution against its arbitrary use, for in a situation where the autonomy of the government has diminished, the repercussions of any misuse of power will be difficult for it to manage. Hence the government rapidly finds itself immersed in a political matrix dotted with numerous veto points. The rise of the veto groups may not suffice to throttle the government, but they are sufficient to block decisions which are interpreted as detrimental to a large-enough bloc of interests. The government will find itself in a situation where occasional resort to draconian measures, backed up by coercion, have to be made.

But that would further erode its authority. Moreover, the closer is 1997, the less will be the government's capacity to assert itself in such manner. If nothing is done about it, an 'authority crisis' will ensue.

The most prominent contradictions in the reformed political system are located in the relationship between the Legislative Council and the executive institutions (the Executive Council and the civil service) headed by the Governor. Before the inclusion of elective elements in the Legislative Council, 'consensus' among the Councillors could be secured by the adroit manipulation of the appointment process to preclude the entry of discordant elements in the elitist legislature. The homogeneity of the Councillors was guaranteed by their largely shared socio-economic background and their uniform allegiance to the Governor. Despite the appeal to 'consensus' by some 'senior' (appointed) Councillors, the reformed legislature has become a new political entity characterized by: (1) divergent sources of recruitment of members; (2) heterogeneity of their socio-economic background; (3) different conceptions of legitimacy and accountability; (4) contrasting valuations of 'consensus politics'; (5) manifold definitions of the role of the legislator (with the 'trustee', 'representative' and 'spokesman' roles predominant); (6) penetration of outside forces into the legislature through the elected members and the increasingly politicized and militant appointed members; (7) mutually incompatible decision-making styles; (8) divergent political allegiances; (9) breakdown of the 'seniority' and 'disciplinary' system; and (10) the legislature becoming the arena for the assertion of Hong Kong interests vis-a-vis those of the Hong Kong, British and Chinese governments.<sup>48</sup>

Legislative politics becomes more open and sensational, as a growing number of legislators resort to public appeals through the mass media. Debates inside and outside the legislative chamber become more

acrimonious. Personal attacks are not infrequent.

At a time when a strong and decisive government is needed, the Hong Kong government is curbed by a legislature which is its own creation. However, a conflict-infested legislature is however bound to be a weak one, with a lot of veto power but without the unity of purpose and action to constructively take part in policy-making or in effectively overseeing the work of the government. A fractionized legislature cannot even effectively use the power at its disposal (such as the power bestowed on it by the Legislative Council (Power and Privileges) Ordinance), thus making a mockery of its power and rendering it superfluous. A legislature which has a lot of responsibility but not much power is susceptible to radicalization. Perhaps a way out of this impasse is to gradually transform it into the center of power as in the parliamentary system, but this alternative has already been foreclosed.

The relationship between the Legislative Council and the local bodies is far from cordial. Personal and institutional jealousies and mutual suspicions are the culprits for this state of affairs. So are feelings of status inferiority on the part of the district boards. Perhaps the most pertinent factors must be the ambiguous division of labor between the central and local bodies and the demand of the district boards for an enlarged jurisdiction as well as executive functions. The 'boycott' of the district board chairmen and many D.B. members of the consultative sessions of the Legislative Council was a vivid expression of the 'hostile' attitude of the local leaders.<sup>49</sup> It can also be interpreted as the outburst of the frustration of a group of leaders who have high hopes (instilled largely by the government in its extolment of the district boards) for their institutions and themselves, who now find themselves without real power and cast away into political oblivion.<sup>50</sup>

Out of a desire to reassert themselves and instigated by the overlapping of functions between themselves and the Urban and Regional Councils, the district boards are also embroiled in a 'turf war' with the two Councils, which are perceived as much better treated by the government (in terms of financial autonomy, executive responsibilities and the remuneration of the Councillors) and whose functions are deemed to be more effectively performed by the district boards themselves. What makes the conflict between the two Councils and the district boards difficult to resolve is the fact that the district boards can only become more politically significant if they can take over the functions of the two Councils. Conflict between them is hence unavoidable.<sup>51</sup> The recent decision of the political structure subgroup of the Basic Law Drafting Committee to basically 'freeze' the functions of the regional and local bodies after 1997 will exacerbate this conflict, as the parties are now locked in a zero-sum game.<sup>52</sup>

#### Possible Future Developments

How can the Hong Kong government, mired in a turbulent environment, presiding over an increasingly unwieldy and contradictory political system, and suffering from declining authority and autonomy, maintain effective and sufficiently stable rule in its last years? Past decolonization experience would suggest the forging of a loose alliance among democratic activists, traditional elements and pro-British groups to take over gradually power from the departing colonial master. But this option is out of question in Hong Kong. The weak and splintered democratic movement in Hong Kong cannot be compared with the all-encompassing nationalist movement in the former colonies, to ally with them will be contrary to the long-term interests of Britain and will lead to immediate

confrontation with China. Under the existing circumstances, it is doubtful that the democratic activists can coalesce into a significant political force in the future. There are even signs that the government is distancing itself from them. Hong Kong as an urbanized and modernized society also does not provide the traditional elements (e.g. Indian princes, Malay sultans or African chiefs) who would act as a moderate and conservative force sympathetic with British rule. The pro-British groups (the co-opted elites, business interests and professional-managerial groups) are similarly not an appropriate ally. They do not have organizational linkage with the people, they are losing credibility as a result of their association with the declining colonial regime, their allegiance to Britain is dubious (many of them have gone over to the Chinese side) and they fail to demonstrate sufficient commitment to Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong government can of course relapse into ad hocism and incrementalism, which had been its hallmarks in the past, and which still are largely its decision-making style. But to stick to this style in a veto-infused environment can only lead to policy immobilism, which would be a source of instability in the extraordinary transitional period, where long-term planning and bold decisions are called for. A lame-duck government would ineluctably exacerbate the plight of 'ungovernability'.

Another option for the government, which is now being practised, is to establish a 'negotiated order' by accommodating the new political actors in an enlarged decision-making arena. These new actors obviously include China, Britain, the newly-emergent political groups and the increasingly politicized socio-economic interests. Compromising, bargaining and 'consensus-making' are the names of the game, and the government plays the central role in reconciling diverse interests so that a semblance of effective governance can be maintained. But the government has been

only partially successful so far with this strategy, and for several reasons: (1) the political arena is not opened up sufficiently to the satisfaction of most of the relevant interests; (2) some of the interests involved (such as China and Britain) are clearly more powerful than the Hong Kong government, and so their wishes will predominate, often to the chagrin of the minor interests; (3) political reforms by the government, with the fragmentation and dispersal of the power devolved, have already created such a large number of new interests that 'consensus-making' is very difficult, sometimes impossible; (4) some of the groups (particularly the more radicalized democratic groups) cannot really be accommodated into a conservatively-oriented 'negotiated order', and finally (5) a government suffering from declining authority and possibly hampered by future economic difficulties simply does not have enough resources to satisfy a majority of the interests in the 'negotiated order', and ultimately it has to choose between interests more crucial to continued British rule and those less so. In the final analysis, a broad-fronted 'negotiated order', under existing circumstances, is bound to fail in the future, and in the end it is most likely that the democratic and uncompromisingly dissident elements will be excluded.

In order to preserve stable and effective rule, the most probable action that will be taken by the Hong Kong government will be made up of two components: (1) the reinforcement of the authority of the government by increasing reliance upon China as an informal 'partner' in the governance of Hong Kong, and (2) a reorganization of the power structure in the political system so that the role of the bureaucracy will be strengthened, and within the bureaucracy the leadership position of the hardcore officers (the elite administrative class) will be enhanced. Both components will point to the adoption of a moderate authoritarian orientation

on the part of the government, which will be a departure from the previous trend of democratization. Further steps at formal democratization (e.g. the introduction of a small percentage of directly elected members of the Legislative Council) will not substantively alter this moderate authoritarian trend.

Increasing reliance on the participation of China in the governance of Hong Kong will be sought because: (1) the ever-rising power of China will be needed to bolster the faltering authority of the departing regime, (2) the Hong Kong government can no longer 'take care of' the interests of China in Hong Kong alone without incurring irreparable damages to its tenuous ruling position, (3) only China can exert the necessary restraints on the opponents of the government and (4) only China can 're-assemble' the pieces of transferred power that have been dispersed by the Hong Kong government in its previous reforms. An authentic alliance between Britain and China, backed up by the emerging 'united front' formed by China and composed of the business interests and other pro-China elements, should be sufficient to undergird stable and effective rule of the Hong Kong government in the run-up to 1997, particularly in view of the weaknesses of the democratic activists and the political immobilism and apathy of the masses. As this China-centered 'united front' will in time become the 'ruling coalition', it will be an element of continuity between Hong Kong as a British colony and Hong Kong as a Chinese Special Administrative Region.

Within the political system itself, the likely development will be that the Hong Kong government will gradually distance itself from bodies with elective and populist elements, bodies which have once been favored as target of power transfer. There are indications that the government, through the cautious and selective withdrawal of information, is trying

to reduce the decision-making role of the Legislative Council and the district boards.<sup>53</sup> However, in view of the declining authority of the government, it cannot resort to constitutional retrogressions to drastically strengthen the powers of the Governor, as happened in some former colonies such as Cyprus, Malta and British Guiana.<sup>54</sup> Nor can the Governor arbitrarily use the already formidable powers at his disposal, such as the power to dissolve the Legislative Council which was bestowed on him immediately after adoption of the decisions of the White Paper. Even so, the future relationship between the government and the partially elected bodies at both central and local levels is not likely to be a cordial or happily collaborative one.

The increasing dependence on the bureaucracy (the civil service) can be considered a logical phenomenon in the politics of unfinished reforms. Indications of 're-dependence' on the career civil service include efforts to appease civil servants and to fend off any attempts to curb bureaucratic discretion. Over the last two years, civil servants had been given an improved pensions scheme (with the endorsement of China),<sup>55</sup> more and better training facilities and opportunities,<sup>56</sup> and easier accessibility to private sector jobs after retirement.<sup>57</sup> A plan to install a powerful 'ombudsman' as a corrective for maladministration has been virtually shelved.<sup>58</sup> All these are measures taken to boost the morale of the civil servants, which has deteriorated as a result of the 1997 question and democratization.

A government under pressure would also try to exert more control over its resources and personnel and tighten up its supervisory practices. This the Hong Kong government seems to be doing by strengthening the 'ruling stratum' - the administrative officers - in the bureaucracy. The 'generalist', politically more sensitive administrative officers are considered

more loyal and more oriented to take the interests of the government as a whole into account. The administrative class has always been the mainstay of the bureaucracy, though in recent years its monopolization of top posts had been challenged by the professionals and specialists. Re-emphasis on the leadership role of the administrative class will inevitably intensify the conflict between the 'generalists' and the specialists.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the process of 're-centralization' in the bureaucracy, as a means to enhance the solidarity of the civil service in a turbulent environment, will aggravate the conflict between upper and lower civil servants, a conflict that had plagued the administration in the past two decades. In any event, this attempt at 're-centralization' will encounter almost insurmountable obstacles since the civil service is now much more heterogeneous, more diverse in political orientations, more unionized and more prone to penetration by political influence from outside (including China). It is not inconceivable that in its efforts to strengthen and 're-centralize' the civil service, the Hong Kong government will feel compelled to seek the support of China, and the support will be forthcoming.

### Conclusion

The decolonization process in Hong Kong must be entered into history as a very intriguing event in that it is afflicted with ironies and unexpected consequences. The initial British attempt to swiftly transplant a quasi-Westminster system of government to Hong Kong so as to enable the people there to stand on their own feet in the post-1997 era would in all likelihood end up differently: (1) The original trend of democratization will be taken over by a trend of moderate authoritarianism, (2) The expedient and compromising strategy of fragmenting and dispersing the power transferred results in a situation where only China

will be in a position to 're-assemble' these scattered pieces of power and build a strong ruling coalition (not necessarily in the form of a visible political party) to dominate the political system, as the local forces are not in a position to consolidate into a potent ruling force in an electoral system dominated by indirect elections. (3) The participation of China in the governance of Hong Kong as a 'partner' of the incumbent government will be earlier than expected because of the growing inability of the Hong Kong government to control the veto power exercised by groups which are the creatures of its political reforms. (4) The initial direction of building a parliamentary government will be shifted to an executive-centered system of government due to the re-dependence on the bureaucracy and its 're-centralization' and as a result of the takeover of the reform initiative by China (through the Basic Law drafting process).

These ironies and unintended consequences, in retrospect, can be easily explained. Decolonization in Hong Kong failed to provide a coherent foundation for development toward a clearcut institutional goal (a quasi-Westminster model). The lack of previous preparations, the absence of a political organizational infrastructure, the lack of determination on the part of Britain, the improvised nature of the reforms, the misfit between the reforms and objective conditions, the incongruities within the reformed institutional structure, the objection and pressure from China, the opposition of the vested interests (notably the business sector) and, most importantly, the impossibility of independence are the factors which readily come to mind. Consequently, raising of the false hope of a parliamentary government only worked to unleash a large variety of political forces whose demands could not be met by the government and who could not be smoothly integrated into the existing system. In the process political conflicts multiplied while the institutional coherence of the

original system could not be maintained. In the end, a backlash set in, culminating in the emergence of a moderately authoritarian and executive-centered government, buttressed by China, to restore political order while simultaneously producing political alienation and frustration.

The return to an executive-centered political system by the Hong Kong government will definitely facilitate the convergence between the system inherited from Britain and the future system imposed by China. Still, in order for convergence to occur, institutional refurbishments have to be made so as to remove the contradictions within the existing structure. In the final analysis, institutional continuity of the political system of Hong Kong will not be fundamentally disturbed by the tragicomical interlude of the unfinished reforms of the departing colonial government.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A *Draft Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Future of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 26 September 1984).
- <sup>2</sup> 'Former British colonies' here refer to colonies making up the 'new' or 'second' British Empire and acquired after roughly 1815. They were colonies populated mainly by people of the non-British race.
- <sup>3</sup> See Norman Miners, *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 166-179.
- <sup>4</sup> D.J. Morgan, *Guidance Towards Self-Government in British Colonies* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980) pp. 62, 216, 228.
- <sup>5</sup> For both the 1946 and 1966 reform proposals, see Norman Miners, *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 237-239.
- <sup>6</sup> For a summarization of *The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Constitutional Development in the Smaller Colonial Territories* submitted to the Secretary of State in August 1951, see *ibid*, pp. 45-46.
- <sup>7</sup> N.J. Miners, "Plans for Constitutional Reform in Hong Kong, 1946-52", *The China Quarterly*, 107 (September, 1986), pp. 463-482.
- <sup>8</sup> An illustrative example of China's anxiety about taking over only a 'nominal' sovereignty from Britain was her interpretation (disclosed through informal channels) of the implications of the age-old The Colonial Laws Validity Act, enacted in 1865, for the future sovereignty of China over Hong Kong. Among other things, Section V of the Act granted to the representative legislature (any colonial legislature which comprised a legislative body of which one half were elected by inhabitants of the colony) "full power to make laws respecting the constitution, powers and procedure of such legislature, provided that such laws shall have been passed in such manner and form as may from time to time be required, by any Act of Parliament, Letters Patent, Order in Council, or colonial law for the time being in force in the said colony." In 1865, the Act, which dealt with a longstanding issue about the validity of colonial laws when they were repugnant to the British common law and triggered off by the 'Boothby Affair' in South Australia, reflected an attitude toward legislative autonomy in the colonies of the Colonial Office that was described as "liberal and progressive" (D.B. Swinfen, *Imperial Control of Colonial Legislation 1813-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 178). To what extent this Act applies to Hong Kong is unclear, such as whether a legislature half of whose members are indirectly elected would become an ipso facto representative legislature. China's apprehension that the coming into force of the Act will mean that full legislative power would then be passed from the Governor to the legislature is also unfounded in the strict legal sense, as the legislature will still be restrained by a number of superior legal instruments. What China has



in fact in mind however are: that the acquisition of the powers to change its constitution, powers and procedure would generate wide-ranging possibilities for the Legislative Council to acquire complete legislative power which would give it a supreme status in the political system; and, more importantly, out of suspicion of British intentions, the Hong Kong government will be unwilling to restrain the legislature by means of the superior legal instruments, or be conciliatory to the demands of the legislators, or be powerless or feel politically inexpedient to oppose the initiatives from the legislature, or worse still, be in conspiracy with the legislature by collaborating clandestinely with it in transforming it into the repository of the sovereign powers of Britain. Any of these scenarios would imply the transfer of power to the people of Hong Kong and reduce the power that will be returned to China in 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, "Hong Kong After the Sino-British Agreement: The Limits to Change", *Pacific Affairs*, 59, no. 2 (Summer 1986) pp. 214-236.

<sup>10</sup> An example of small-scale Chinese participation in the electoral game can be found in the 1985 District Board Election. See Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, "The 1985 District Board Election in Hong Kong: The Limits of Political Mobilization in a Dependent Polity", *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 25, no. 1 (March 1987) pp. 82-102. Since 1985, a small number of pro-China leaders have also found their way into the Legislative Council.

<sup>11</sup> Collier, *Regimes in Tropical Africa: Change Forms of Supremacy, 1945-1975* (Berkeley and L.A., Calif.: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 29-30.

<sup>12</sup> A vivid example is Singapore where the British government suppressed the communists there to expedite the rise to power of the less radical faction of the People's Action Party led by Lee Kuan Yew. See John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> In a survey of a systematic sample (N=767) of residents in Kwun Tong (an industrial community of Hong Kong) in 1985 by Dr. Kuan Hsin-chi and myself, only 31.5 per cent of the respondents were trustful or very trustful of the Chinese government, and only 22.3 per cent of them thought that China would allow the people of Hong Kong to manage their own affairs. Furthermore, a large proportion of them, 84.7 per cent, regarded that their ability to influence the policy of the Hong Kong government as small or very small. In 1986, another survey of the residents of Kwun Tong was conducted by Mrs. Law Wan Po-san and myself (a systematic sample of 539), it was found that only 25.4 per cent of the respondents were trustful or very trustful of the Chinese government. 50.3 per cent of them expected the standard of living after 1997 to remain stagnant or decline; 60.3 per cent thought that personal freedom would be reduced; 56.9 per cent thought that there would be a diminution of human rights and 52.3 predicted decadence of the judiciary. As in 1985, a large proportion of them (87.9 per cent) stated that they had no influence at all on the Hong Kong government.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1985 study mentioned in the last note, only 33.8 per cent of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that it was very likely that democratic politics would facilitate the rise of careerists set out to harm the public. As to their opinion toward the 'pressure groups', 58.5 per cent said that they could find no trustworthy pressure group leaders; and 53.5 per cent of them regarded the activities of the 'pressure groups' as endangering the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. In the 1986 survey mentioned in the last note, only 22.7 per cent of the respondents thought that the 'pressure groups' had made great or very great contributions to the improvement of the living environment of the people of Hong Kong.

<sup>15</sup> See Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, "The Changing Political Culture of the Hong Kong Chinese", in Joseph Y.S. Cheng, ed., *Hong Kong in Transition* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 26-51. In the 1985 survey mentioned in n. 13, 74.3 per cent of the respondents considered the existing political system of Hong Kong as the best that could be found, given the existing circumstances. 72.1 per cent of them were trustful or very trustful of the Hong Kong government. 66.8 per cent of the respondents in the 1986 survey likewise were trustful or very trustful of the Hong Kong government. As to the performance of the Hong Kong government, the 1985 survey found that only 9.5 per cent of the respondents accused the government of doing a bad or very bad job. In a poll commissioned by *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), "[on] a scale of one to 10, in which the top score indicated people thought the authorities were doing an extremely good job and the bottom of the scale that they were doing an extremely bad job, the government won an average rating of 6.3" (SCMP, December 12, 1986, p. 1).

<sup>16</sup> Smith, "A Comparative Study of French and British Decolonization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20, no. 1 (January 1978), p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> For the objection of the business sector to mass franchise, direct election and party politics, as well as their views of the future political system of Hong Kong, see for example, SCMP, June 1, 1986, p. 2; November 5, 1986, p. 2; December 2, 1986, p. 1; and *Ming Pao Daily News*, February 7, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Kilson, *Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Aaron Wildavsky, "Using Public Funds to Serve Private Interests: The Politics of the New Class", in B. Bruce-Briggs, ed., *The New Class?* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1979), p. 148.

- <sup>22</sup> Luis Ratinoff, "The New Urban Groups: The Middle Classes", in Seymour M. Lipset and Aldo Solari, eds., *Elites in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 69.
- <sup>23</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. xviii.
- <sup>24</sup> See Harold L. Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality* (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 54-58.
- <sup>25</sup> The words used by Emerson to characterize local civil servants in former colonies are, probably to a lesser extent, equally apt in Hong Kong. "Even though the local civil servants are by education and background usually the kind of people whom one would otherwise expect to find enlisted in the nationalist movement, their general tendency has been to stand aloof from it and to view it with some of the same suspicion as do their imported fellow officials. The men who have been most successful in their official careers are likely to grant the colonial system the largest measure of acceptance or tolerance. They become imbued with the morale of the service and look askance at those who seek to take over a government without firsthand administrative experience. In the accustomed fashion of the bureaucrat, they, like the expatriate officials, have grave doubts as to the ability of the people to know their needs and manage their own affairs. The over-all consequence is, of course, that the local civil servants are often viewed with suspicion by the nationalists" (*From Empire to Nation*, pp. 249-250). For a discussion of the ambivalent attitude of the Chinese civil servants toward democracy, see Lau Siu-kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, *Chinese Bureaucrats in a Modern Colony: The Case of Hong Kong* (Occasional Paper No. 16, Centre for Hong Kong Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, September 1986).
- <sup>26</sup> See Ambrose Y.C. King, "Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level", *Asian Survey*, 15, no. 5 (May 1975), pp. 422-439; and Lau Siu-kai, *Society and Politics in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982).
- <sup>27</sup> Brian Hook, "The Government of Hong Kong: Change Within Tradition", *The China Quarterly*, no. 95 (September 1983), pp. 491-511.
- <sup>28</sup> *Green Paper: The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, July 1984), p. 4.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.
- <sup>32</sup> *White Paper: The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, November 1984).
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

- <sup>35</sup> See, for instance, *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, 5 December 1985, pp. 12-14; *FEER*, 2 January 1986, pp. 10-11; *Asiaweek*, March 2, 1986, p. 26; *SCMP*, November 6, 1986, p. 1 and *SCMP*, February 12, 1987, p. 1.
- <sup>36</sup> *SCMP*, June 4, 1986, p. 1; *SCMP*, June 14, 1986, p. 1; *FEER*, 7 August 1986, pp. 24-25; *FEER*, 26 December 1985, pp. 14-15; *SCMP*, July 3, 1986, p.1; *FEER*, 11 September 1986, p. 24; *FEER*, 19 February 1987, p. 48; *SCMP*, February 4, 1987, p.1 and *Asiaweek*, February 22, 1987, p. 18.
- <sup>37</sup> *FEER*, 14 November 1985, p. 25; 12 December 1985, p. 21; 16 January 1986, pp. 37-38; 23 October 1986, p. 35 and 30 October 1986, p. 26.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ming Pao Daily News*, February 28, 1986, p. 2.
- <sup>39</sup> *Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1985), p. 5.
- <sup>40</sup> *SCMP*, July 2, 1986, p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Oriental Daily News*, March 31, 1986, p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup> *SCMP*, June 23, 1986, p. 1.
- <sup>43</sup> *SCMP*, July 8, 1985, p. 1.
- <sup>44</sup> *SCMP*, June 20, 1986, p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup> *White Paper on the Annual Report on Hong Kong 1985-86 to Parliament* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 21 February 1987), p. 8.
- <sup>46</sup> Lau Siu-kai, "Political Reform and Political Development in Hong Kong: Dilemmas and Choices", in Y.C. Yao et al, eds., *Hong Kong and 1997: Strategies for the Future* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1985), pp. 23-49.
- <sup>47</sup> Ian Scott, "Policy-Making in a Turbulent Environment: The Case of Hong Kong", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 52 (1986), pp. 447-469.
- <sup>48</sup> This can be seen in the furor over the Daya Bay nuclear plant in 1986 and the Public Order (Amendment) Ordinance in 1987.
- <sup>49</sup> See *SCMP*, November 18, 1986, p. 3; November 19, 1986, p. 1; November 20, 1986, p.1 and November 26, 1986, p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup> See *SCMP*, November 23, 1986, p. 2; December 2, 1986, p. 30 and March 13, 1987, p. 6.
- <sup>51</sup> See *SCMP*, December 12, 1985, p. 2; December 13, 1985, p. 2 and February 8, 1985, p. 2.
- <sup>52</sup> See *Ming Pao Daily News*, March 17, 1987, p. 4.

APPENDIX

<sup>53</sup> See *SCMP*, July 20, 1986, p. 10 and November 23, 1986, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> See Martin Wight, *The Development of the Legislative Council 1606-1945* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1946), pp. 78-81.

<sup>55</sup> *SCMP*, December 6, 1986, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *SCMP*, December 23, 1986, p. 4; January 12, 1987, p. 1; *Ming Pao Daily News*, March 12, 1987, p. 12 and March 19, 1987, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> *FEER*, 22 January 1987, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> See *SCMP*, August 21, 1986, p. 1 for a discussion of the government's intention to set up a weak Commissioner for Administration to investigate complaints against civil servants.

<sup>59</sup> See *Pai Shing Semi-Monthly*, no. 136, January 16, 1987, pp. 40-41.

Decolonization in Former British Colonies

British colonial policy has been noted for its recognition of her colonies as distinct and unique entities and her sensitivity to local traditions. While self-government, and possibly independence, had been declared a long-term goal for the colonies, constitutional advance in the colonies was to be individually designed to take into consideration their particular conditions and degrees of 'preparedness'. The process of decolonization was thus far from uniform and the pace uneven. Amid all the confusing variations in the process of decolonization, it was the transfer of the Westminster model to the colonies that constituted the unifying theme of the process. It was the evolution of the legislature into the center of power that formed the nucleus of the institutional changes.

The evolution of the legislature entailed a changing balance of power not only between colonial officials and local unofficials (at first nominated and then elected) but between the colony and Britain. It had been suggested that four essential stages can be distinguished in the whole process of preparation for self-government:

The first consists of a division of legislative and executive councils and a nomination of un-official members to the legislative council, leading to election of some unofficial members, as in Ceylon in 1910. In the second or "representative" stage, the unofficial members are a majority, as in Ceylon in the nineteen-twenties. This creates problems in the relation between the legislative and the executive councils. The third semiresponsible stage ensues when the majority of the executive comes from or is related to the majority of the legislative council, as in Ceylon in 1931 as a result of the Donoughmore Report or in 1944 as

a result of the Soulbury Report. In the fourth stage, nominated officials disappear from the legislative council, as in Ceylon in 1947. This may be self-government, full self-government, independence; but perhaps a fifth stage should be distinguished to demarcate the actual transfer of power from the preparatory process. Furthermore, many complications, especially in types of ministerialization, will vary the pattern.<sup>1</sup>

It must be emphasized however that Ceylon represents an atypical example of the process of preparation for self-government, in that it had been given exceptional constitutional instruments in her march toward parliamentary supremacy.<sup>2</sup> Other variations and complications include, for example, dyarchy in India,<sup>3</sup> and ministerial responsibility to the Governor instead of to the elected legislature as in the 'member system'. Still, the general trend of constitutional development was unmistakable, and the whole process was essentially concerned with political and administrative changes rather than with economic, social, or cultural ones.

Despite denial by official interpretations, the idea of preparation for the adoption of the Westminster model and the actual steps taken for it were largely phenomena after the Second World War. Even then the whole 'theory of preparation' had been accused as being at best a half-hearted undertaking and at worst a delayed ploy or a tactic of negotiation. It has been said that there had been no grand design for decolonization, hence any claim for a pre-conceived and longstanding 'theory of preparation' can only be taken as a post facto rationalization or a belated afterthought. However, to be fair to the British, it can be said that though the actual preparation for the transfer of institutions and power was a post-War policy undertaken with a lot of resistance,<sup>5</sup> gradual devolution of power in a number of colonies could be traced at least to

the 1920s. Undoubtedly many of these pre-War reforms bespoke of the ability and willingness of Britain to make political concessions in order to maintain stable colonial rule. They were not however deliberate attempts to reach a particular constitutional destination. "Closer inspection commonly reveals the British to have been following Burke's sage counsel to reform in order to preserve: London made concessions more usually to subvert opposition to British rule than to prepare for its demise.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the accumulation of precedents has not failed to establish a tradition of meeting discontent by reforms which associated the subject peoples more closely with their own governing.

Though not without serious reservations, Britain tended to consider the Westminster model the best for their colonies. This was not sheer hypocrisy, but, being a captive of their own historical experience, they could not see any better alternative. From a practical point of view, the successful transplantation of the British model of government to alien lands would be a great tribute to the self-proclaimed civilizing mission of the British Empire. Moreover, putting into power Westernized political elites who were moderate and sympathetic with British interests would be beneficial to the long-term economic and diplomatic interests of Britain.

Paradoxically, the steps taken by the British to 'prepare' their colonies for the operation of the Westminster model were far from appropriate. The social and economic conditions which should provide the underpinnings of the model - high literacy rate, economic well-being, social and ethnic homogeneity - were usually absent. Even though the doctrine of 'good government' had found its way into the colonies in the post-War era,<sup>7</sup> the social and economic projects undertaken by the colonial governments, for want of time and resources, left only limited

impact on the colonies. Consequently, there was no solid social-economic and cultural foundation for the transplanted parliamentary system.

The context within which the colonies were prepared for the Westminster model and the steps taken in preparation for it were either inappropriate or counterproductive. The introduction of elections in the colonies in many cases failed to enable a consolidated Westernized elite to consolidate itself as a ruling force.<sup>8</sup> The application of indirect rule in many British colonies and the British penchant to give special treatment to minority interests worked to fragment the future ruling class by encouraging the mobilization of a diversity of interests. As a result, most of the successor governments in former British colonies were plagued by weakness and disunity.

The political context in which preparation for self-government took place is largely unfavorable. It was ironical that a democratic parliamentary system was to be born within a structure characterized by viceregal hegemony. Colonial officials were the carriers of a brand of aristocratic and paternalistic political ethos which had already lost ground in Britain. Britain's army of colonial administrators had been described as 'inbred and insular', and after World War I, new recruits to the colonial service tended to be ex-officers and later were drawn from the public schools and Oxbridge.<sup>9</sup> Colonial rule was extremely hierarchical, at best paternalist and at worst authoritarian. When colonial officials were charged with the responsibility of guiding the colonies toward parliamentary rule, their attitude was normally one of resistance and indifference. More importantly, they were quite ignorant of the demands and requirements of a parliamentary system. The unsuitability of colonial officials as the instructors of democracy had been proven in the way they tackled with the tasks of developing the legislature into a center of power,

developing local governments or administrations into training grounds for democracy and channels for recruitment of political leaders, and 'localizing' the civil service. In the case of the legislature, despite constitutional provisions, real power was rarely granted to the legislators, who were made subordinate both to the Governor and the bureaucracy. Local politicians and institutions were dominated by the bureaucracy personified and symbolized by the district officer or commissioner, who used to be the father-figure in the local scene. The process of 'localization' took place even later in the process of preparation and it was received with even more hostility by the expatriate colonial officials. Unreasonable standards had been set to recruit and promote local officials, with the result of slowing down the pace of 'localization'.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from the fact that preparation for the transfer of the Westminster model was too little and too late, there was also the question of the appropriateness of that model to the post-independence needs of these new states. After independence had been won, the issues that topped the political agenda were the restoration of political stability which had been disrupted by of conflicting forces unleashed after the withdrawal of colonial rule (particularly ethnic conflicts), nation- and state-building, economic development, political and administrative overload stemming from rising aspirations, breaking up the resistance to modernization by traditional forces and even ideological re-socialization of the people. What was urgently needed was 'government' in the literal sense of the term. In view of the difficult tasks before the government and the shortage of resources of all kinds, an authoritarian political system possibly combined with charismatic leadership would be more capable of dealing with the political problems afflicting the new states than the Westminster system which put a premium on debates, bargaining,

compromise and voting by majorities. Besides, "[the] notion of parliament as a means of accommodating conflicting interests and conflicting ideas of the common good does not fit a view of politics which regards interests narrower than those of the whole society as having no legitimacy and which regards the conflict of ideas of the common good as meaningless. Rousseauism and constitutional parliamentary government do not go well together."<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, within a decade after independence, most of the former British colonies degenerated into authoritarian one-party or military rule. In those countries that still managed to maintain a semblance or parliamentary government, the substance of politics was a mockery of it (e.g. de facto one-party hegemony in India, Malaysia and Singapore, patron-clientship in Jamaica.)<sup>12</sup> All in all, the dismal failure of the transfer of the Westminster model by Britain to her colonies ironically attests to the stringent conditions that are needed to make that model work smoothly. Broadly speaking, the fact that the Westminster model works only in very few nations today testifies to its extremely limited applicability to areas which do not share Anglo-Saxon historical experience and which cannot reproduce similar social and cultural configuration.<sup>13</sup>

#### Notes for the Appendix

- <sup>1</sup>B.B. Schaffer, "The Concept of Preparation: Some Questions about the Transfer of Systems of Government", *World Politics*, 18, no. 1 (October 1965), pp. 47-48.
- <sup>2</sup>In the Ceylon representative constitution of 1923 unofficials on the executive council were explicitly precluded from forming a bridge between executive and legislature. The result, in a constitution providing for an elected majority on the legislative council, was a decisive turn away from the normal development toward responsible government; the executive council could not become a cabinet; it was eclipsed in importance by the finance committee of the legislative council and sank into insignificance; and when semi-responsible government not cabinet government, and the executive council was abolished. See Martin Wight, *The Development of the Legislative Council 1606-1945* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1946), pp. 95-97 and 134-135. See also Dennis Austin, "The Transfer of Power: Why and How", in W.H. Morris-Jones and Georges Fischer, eds., *Decolonization and After: The British and French Experience* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), p. 7; and Henri Grimal, *Decolonization: The British, French, Dutch and Belgian Empires 1919-1963* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 102-103 and 228-229.
- <sup>3</sup>'Dyarchy' establishes a division between affairs of local and affairs of imperial concern. Powers in connection with the administration of local affairs were devolved to the subject people, but powers thus devolved were bound within certain limits. Diarchical government was devised as a stepping-stone toward full responsible government. There were several variants of it, and its best known form in India was not always copied. In the case of India, "[the] devolution [of power] made possible the system of dual government generally known as dyarchy, established in the provinces by the 1919 Act. The subjects under the control of the provinces were divided into two groups, known as 'transferred' and 'reserved' subjects. The 'transferred' subjects would be under the charge of Indian ministers, and the Governors would normally act on their advice in respect of them. The intention was that ministers would regard themselves as responsible to the Legislature - as an embryonic 'responsible government'. In the case of the 'reserved' subjects the government would go on very much as before and Governors were given the necessary powers to secure the passage of any legislation necessary to their handling of these subjects." (Sir Percival Griffiths, *The British Impact on India* (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1965), p. 319.)
- <sup>4</sup>According to J.M. Lee, in the majority of colonies, the 'member system' marked the first stage of the process leading to cabinet government. This system allocated responsibility for a group of departments to a 'member' of the Executive Council who was then in a position to defend and explain their policies to the legislature. See *Colonial Development and Good Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 228. The 'member system', introduced in Northern Rhodesia, Kenya, and Tanganyika after World War II was rooted in responsibility to the governor, not to

- <sup>4</sup> the legislative council. In Kenya and Tanganyika, when formerly unofficial members of the legislative council were appointed they had to become civil servants. The same happened in Uganda. Furthermore, even in the policy of Creech Jones, the Labor Colonial Minister, the 'member system' was to lead to ministerialization only very slowly: first, executive council members were to be responsible for branches of central government; then indigenous people outside the civil service were to be members; then members were to be renamed ministers; at last ministers were to be responsible to the legislative council. See Schaffer, "The Concept of Preparation", p. 53; and Barry Munslow, "Why Has the Westminster Model Failed in Africa", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 23 (Spring 1983), pp. 224-225.
- <sup>5</sup> See Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 33-34.
- <sup>6</sup> Tony Smith, "A Comparative Study of French and British Decolonization", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20, no. 1 (January 1978), p. 73.
- <sup>7</sup> See J.M. Lee, *op. cit.*
- <sup>8</sup> See Ruth B. Collier, *Regimes in Tropical Africa: Changing Forms of Supremacy, 1946-1975* (Berkeley and L.A., Calif.: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 63-94.
- <sup>9</sup> Munslow, "Why Has the Westminster", p. 224.
- <sup>10</sup> See Richard Symonds, *The British and Their Successors: A Study in the Development of the Government Services in the New States* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).
- <sup>11</sup> Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 471.
- <sup>12</sup> See Robert A. Scalapino et al eds., *Asian Political Institutionalization* (Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986); and Carl Stone, *Democracy and Clientelism in Jamaica* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1980).
- <sup>13</sup> See Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).