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UTILITARIANISTIC FAMILISM: THE BASIS OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN HONG KONG*

by

LAU SIU-KAI

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UTILITARIANISTIC FAMILISM: THE BASIS OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN HONG KONG

To many observers, Hong Kong is a political puzzle. Located at the periphery of a colossal communist power which persistently vows to demolish all residual colonialism in the world, and which can take over that tiny colony at short notice, Hong Kong still remains the crown colony of Great Britain. It is even more intriguing to find that, in the last several decades, not only has Hong Kong been prospering economically, enjoying high economic growth rates; but she also has been a politically stable society, which is a rather rare phenomenon in the modern era. Since the Second World War, only three instances of riotous activities have been reported, none of them was related to attempts to challenge the legitimacy of the colonial government or to drastically change the political status of the colony. Moreover, popular participation in these violent activities was minimal and negligent, and they were greeted with either stern resistance or passive noncooperation by the populace at large.

To grapple with the problem of political stability in Hong Kong, it is not sufficient, as many analysts are used to do, to attempt only to explain her continual existence as a British colony, as this will enable us to solve merely a part of the problem, and this is not a very essential part. The colonial status of Hong Kong is

primarily contingent upon the delicate political relationships between Britain and China, as well as a host of international factors -- and these are all exogenous factors, which fail to take into consideration the social organization and political structure of the colony, and more specifically, the typical normative and behavioural patterns of the Chinese majority which structure their relationships with the colonial regime. The analysis of the structural and cultural aspects of the Hong Kong society is the key to the solution of the problem of political stability in the colony.

Varieties of Structural-Cultural Explanations

Among the structural-cultural explanations proffered, two are particularly propagated and entertained: the political apathy of the Chinese people,[1] and the political support rendered to the colonial regime by the Chinese elites in Hong Kong.[2]

The view that the Chinese people in Hong Kong are, generally speaking, politically apathetic has been corroborated by some research findings,[3] though so far no study has yet been done to specify the analytic dimensions of the generic concept of political apathy and their distribution in the Chinese populace. A subordinate group which is considered to be politically apathetic will not be expected to challenge the authority

and decision-making prerogatives of the dominant group, though, correspondingly, the degree of legitimacy granted to the dominant group will also be low. Be that as it may, a colonial society such as Hong Kong with its apathetic Chinese majority group does exhibit a low level of political activism and, hence, a high level of political stability.

Many factors have been attributed to the prevalent apathetic political attitudes among the Chinese citizens. Among them are: (1) A large portion of the Hong Kong population consists of ex-refugees from China, and the "traumatic experiences they have undergone predispose most refugees to political quietism."[4] (2) Since most of the Chinese citizens are reluctant to live under Communist rule, "for the present apparently most prefer to endure the British devil that they know rather than run the risk that any attempt at political agitation might unintentionally put an end to the colony's separate existence."[5] (3) Hong Kong's phenomenal economic performance and the rising living standards for the majority predispose them toward acceptance of the existing conditions. (4) The administrative efficiency of the colonial government and the relative congruence of the political institutions with the existing patterns of political culture.[6] (5) The co-optation of the potential protest leaders into the government machinery

deprives the protest movements of their potential leaders and hence makes mobilization of the mass for political movements extremely difficult. (6) The limited time-span of the colony's existence makes for toleration with the status quo as it is regarded to be only temporary.[7] (7) The survival and continuance of the traditional Chinese attitudes to government, which feature bureaucratic paternalism and passive acquiescence among the public.[8]

Explaining political stability in Hong Kong by means of the alleged apathy of the Chinese majority is highly appealing in that it provides a short-cut solution to a series of perplexing problems. Nevertheless, it is at once too simplistic and too inadequate to serve as an explanatory schema. Using the term 'apathy' indiscriminately and unconditionally would tend to stretch the meaning of the concept too far in order to explain almost everything, and it fails just because it cannot explain why some people spontaneously participated in, say, the 1966 Star Ferry incident[9] and the various petition activities[10] in the last several years. My major objection to the adoption of 'political apathy' as the primary, or sole, causal variable to explain political stability in Hong Kong is that it tends to attribute to the Chinese citizens as innate psychological trait which may, upon further analysis, simply be an adaptive device

developed, consciously or subconsciously, by the Chinese citizens to negotiate with the wider social and political environment. In this sense, 'political apathy' is merely an epiphenomenon derived from the social-cultural context, and this context must be analyzed in order to furnish us with more adequate explanations.

An alternative explanation of political stability in Hong Kong focuses on the support of the colonial government rendered by the Chinese elites, particularly prominent among which are those in the commercial and industrial sectors. As Hong Kong is not an independent or democratic state, representative institutions wherein elites with differentiated interests and resource bases vie for political power and influence are largely absent. Nevertheless, elite-group participation in policy-making in the colony is effected through the so-called process of 'administrative absorption of politics.'

> . . . The administrative absorption of politics is a process through which the British governing elites coopt or assimilate the non-British socio-economic elites into the political-administrative decision-making bodies, thus obtaining an elite integration on the one hand and a legitimation of political authority on the other. We have witnessed a system of synarchy, though lopsided, or close to what Professor Endacott called 'government by discussion' operating in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is not a democracy, but the government does have a special brand of politics which is concerned with the opinion of the governed. However, this synarchy or 'government by discussion' is only open to a rather small sector of the population: men of wealth, established or new.

> This ingenuity of the British governing elites is in their sophisticated response in timely enlarging and modifying the structure of ruling bodies by coopting or assimilating emerging non-British socio-economic elites into 'we' groups at critical periods. Consequently, any strong counter-elite groups are prevented from being developed in the first place. In short, Hong Kong has been governed by an elite consensus in the last century or so.11

The Chinese elites thus coopted constitute a rather solidary and cohesive group with interlocking business and kinship relationships among a large portion of their members.[12] Cooperation with and cooptation of the Chinese elites by the colonial government not only smoothen the operation of the polity, they also confer an aura of legitimacy to the decisions and undertakings of the government. Most importantly, along the processes, elite support is enlisted and political stability maintained.

However, in several ways the 'elite support' theory fails to account sufficiently for the prevalence of political stability in Hong Kong. First, the elite absorption process is never complete. As a matter of fact, the degree of diversity of elites who can gain access to the policy-making realm in the Hong Kong government is rather low.

> . . . All groups do not have equal access to government and officials are highly selective in choosing the groups with which they are willing to hold consultations. This system favours the richer business and employer groups, who are largely represented on advisory committees. Government needs their help, and so must pay

> attention to their views. Other groups, particularly the trade unions and those speaking for the poorer sections of society, can provide less positive assistance in administration to the bureaucracy and so are more easily ignored. Officials sometimes argue that such groups are not really representative and that if government consulted with them it would give them an exaggerated idea of their own importance. Unions in particular are regarded with suspicion because the majority of them are affiliated to communist or nationalist dominated organizations, and in consequence they have representation on only two advisory bodies. . . .13

Second, participation in voluntary organizations is still minimal among the Hong Kong citizens. As most of the members in the elite groups are also incumbents of the administrative positions in these organizations, the extremely low social participation rate of the Chinese citizens means that formally these Chinese elites hardly represent the interests of the majority of the people. Generally speaking, with the availability of groups of noncoopted elites and the majority of Chinese citizens unrepresented by any elites, there should always be the possibility of people being mobilized into action by the disgruntled, noncoopted elites. Therefore, the 'elite support' theory of political stability at most posits a situation wherein a close coalition between the government and an extremely small elite group is in operation, and there is no guarantee that this coalition is sufficient in itself to ensure political stability in Hong Kong. If, under such a political arrangement, political stability

is still maintained, the answer must be sought in the social organization and cultural orientations of the non-elite, with particular emphasis on the social structural factors which hinder their being mobilized into hostile political movements, and their attitudes toward the political system.

Both the 'political apathy' theory and the 'elite support' theory are inadequate precisely because they fail to deal with the problem of the mobilization potential of the subordinate Chinese majority, the analysis of which is contingent upon a cultural and structural study of the social organization of this large group. In this paper, these significant problem-areas will constitute our main themes of enquiry, and the arguments are primarily based on the data collected in a questionnaire survey of 550 Hong Kong Chinese citizens in the period December 1976 - March 1977.[14]

Utilitarianistic Familism as the Alternative Explanatory Schema

To inquire into the basis of political stability in Hong Kong, it is essential that the normative and behavioural patterns characteristic of the majority of the Chinese people, and the interactional and organizational structure which can be inferred from them, must be meticulously analyzed. Our research has its principal

goal the construction of an alternative theoretical framework to grapple with the problem of political stability in Hong Kong. This new theoretical framework is built upon the key concept of utilitarianistic familism, which is a syndrome of normative and behavioural traits typical of a majority of the Chinese people in Hong Kong. Geared to the investigation of political stability in Hong Kong, the concept of utilitarianistic familism is an ideal-type concept since it abstracts from the melange of normative and behavioural traits of the majority of the Chinese a relatively coherent set of normative and behavioural tendencies which can be used for explanatory purposes. This coherence, however, is primarily a theoretical construct of the researcher, and may not necessarily exist in the consciousness of the individuals.

In gist, utilitarianistic familism can be defined as a normative and behavioural tendency of an individual to place his familial interests above the interests of society as well as its constituent individuals and groups, and to structure his relationships with other individuals and groups in such a fashion that the furtherance of his familial interests is the primary consideration. Moreover, among the familial interests, materialistic interests takes priority over all other non-materialistic interests.

Utilitarianistic familism differs from the kind of familism characteristic of traditional China. Familism in traditional China was derived from a family system which was multi-functional, more or less self-sufficient, hierarchically structured, and complexly organized.[15] The existence of common familial property and the concentration of the familial members in a certain locality were the key factors for familial cohesion and solidarity. This was made possible in particular by the larger society which was lowly differentiated and built upon an agricultural production system. In a certain sense, traditional familism as both normative and behavioural orientations was functional for social stability and integration in an agrarian society. Utilitarianistic familism can be considered as an adaptation of traditional familism to the industrial, urban and colonial society of Hong Kong where individuals are more or less alienated from the social and political order, and are uncertain about the future. Nevertheless, unlike traditional familism, almost all of the organizational and ecological features of the traditional family are no longer visible. The typical family in Hong Kong is a small family (a nuclear family plus perhaps a number of relatives) located in a complex network of interdependencies among societal units, which is a result of the rapid division of labour process.[16]

Utilitarianistic familism is, hence, a kind of familism wherein the family (the extent of inclusion of the family differs among families) represents the major reference group with which an individual identifies and for whose material well-being an individual strives. Here thus lies the main difference between utilitarianistic familism and traditional familism. Traditional familism treats the family as an integrated part of society, thus both the political and social participation of the familial members are encouraged, and this is unmistakably stipulated in the Confucian classics.[17] As a matter of fact, symbolic and cultural rewards from society are deemed of prime importance. Contrariwise, utilitarianistic familism does not value very much the non-material rewards which society can proffer; rather, society is considered to be largely insignificant, and the family is to 'exploit' society for its own utilitarian purposes.

There is a number of dimensions under this concept of utilitarianistic familism, and each dimension can be further divided into a normative and a behavioural component. These dimensions and components are conceptual categories in an analytic sense, they are not statistical categories as inferred from, for instance, a multivariate statistical technique known as factor analysis. These conceptual categories are constructed before the data

collection process so as to structure that process, and hence are not conclusive findings after a studious data analysis process. Nevertheless, data obtained from the 550 respondents do corroborate the existence of these dimensions and components, though with some minor revisions and modifications. In this paper, it is the final version which is reported.

A. Dimension I: Major Normative Orientations

The content of this dimension contains in broad strokes the most salient tenets embedded in the normative orientation of the Hong Kong Chinese. In other words, this may be considered to be the gist or essence underlying the various manifestations of utilitarianistic familism, or the basic scaffold on which utilitarianistic familism is built.

(1) Emphasis on materialistic needs and immediate materialistic satisfaction Materialistic value is the primary criterion for the evaluation of any intrinsic good in the world. Materialistic considerations are involved in most cost-benefit analysis by the individuals and thus influence their behaviour in one way or another. When asked about their criteria for the choice of jobs, only 39.6% of our respondents were definite in not using salary as the only criterion for the acceptance of a given job, while a majority of them was at best hesitant.

Even if they were already well-fed and well-clothed, 58.9% of them still expressed yearnings for more money, and only a minority or 29.6% of them did not cherish such an aspiration and remained content with the satisfaction of their basic needs.

(2) Short-term time horizon When asked about whether they had plans for the next two to three years, 67.1% of the respondents gave the reply that they had no plan at all. If the time period of reference was lengthened to 15 to 20 years, the percentage of respondents with no plan in mind jumped to a striking 80.4%.

(3) Emphasis on social stability 'Social Stability' loomed large in the mind of the respondents. An overwhelming majority of them, 87.3%, would definitely prefer social stability to economic prosperity. To measure the intensity of this preference for social stability, our respondents were posed with another question, which asked them whether they would still remain in a society with social stability but without too much social justice. Again, 41.8% of the respondents indicated willingness to remain in that society, and only a minority of them was definite in their unwillingness to stay. In Hong Kong, many people are disposed to preserve social stability at any costs, and this disposition would also imply that our respondents would withdraw from any activities which they perceived would lead to the disruption of social stability.

B. Dimension II: Relationship Between the Individual and the Family

Generally speaking, to the respondents, the ideal-typical familial group was one comprising of oneself, one's parents, spouse, siblings, children, some close relatives and friends. Most of the social interactions were among the core familial members, but these, together with other close relatives, close friends and distant relatives, made up the grouping with which one diffusely identified with. For the non-core members, a measure of selectivity, based on utilitarian considerations, in the recruitment process was evident.

(1) Normative component The significance of the family is clearly evident as 85.6% of the respondents had rated either 'the family more important' or 'both family and society equally important', as against 13.5% of them who considered 'society more important.' On the other hand, when asked about their felt responsibility to elevate the status of their families, a substantial percentage of them (47.8%) took the rather uninvolved stance of 'having some responsibility' 30.5% of them shirked all responsibilities whatsoever. Only a minority of them, 19.8%, would still consider themselves as being responsible for earning status for the family. Hence, in contrary to the ideal in traditional China, the status of the family in society is not of much concern to the

average Chinese in Hong Kong. Not only is familial prestige as a whole not significant, it happens that prestige earned by someone else in the family also does not arouse any sense of pride within them. When asked whether they felt proud because of other family members' achievements in society, 63.1% of the respondents did not have such feelings. As a matter of fact, symbolic rewards from society is de-emphasized in the ordinary operations of the Hong Kong families. In addition to its symbolic value, the family is highly instrumental. If they were in financial straits, more than half (59.8%) of our respondents would consider approaching their own families initially for assistance. It is really shocking to find only 3.1% and 1.6%, respectively, of our respondents who would consider approaching social welfare organizations and government departments for help. This not only suggests cogently the crucial role played by the 'informal welfare system' in the social organization of the Hong Kong Chinese, but also how remote are government and society in the psychological horizons of the average Hong Kong man.

(2) <u>The Behavioural Component</u> The significance of the family is further indicated by the fact that 86.0% of the respondents stated that they spent most of their spare time with their families. Moreover, more than half of the respondents had either received or given at least some

amount of financial and other contributions from or to their family members.

C. Dimension III: Relationship Between the Individual and Family to Other Social Groups

A family in Hong Kong usually would prefer to adopt an avoidance attitude and stance toward other social groups, and, in order to ward them off, the family is prepared to resort to some self-sacrifices as far as it is tolerable and practicable. On the other hand, a certain amount of interaction with other social groups is allowable if utilitarian interests are involved.

(1) Normative component When asked about whether conflict with outsiders (people outside of the family) should be avoided as far as possible even if that would incur damages to oneself and one's family, 82.2% of our respondents answered in the affirmative. This indicates that even though familial interests are of enormous importance, these still do not justify conflict with outsiders lest these interests would be threatened. Unless the stake at hand is so large that conflict avoidance would mean utter dissolution of familial interests, the family is willing to concede as far as possible to shun conflict with others. Furthermore, our respondents not only set appropriate behavioural standards for themselves with regard to conflict with outsiders,

they would also apply these standards to others. 56.0% of them would not concur with the behaviour of those people who, in safeguarding their familial interests, engage in social conflict with others, thus leading to damages to the innocent. Social stability, to reiterate, was very much in the mind of our respondents, and they would not tolerate socially disruptive activities of others, even though these activities were justified under the pretext of familial interests.

That a certain amount of interaction with outsiders is allowed provided utilitarian interests are at stake can be demonstrated by the answers given to a question which asked the respondents whether they would still keep a person as their friend if that man was deficient in many ways and yet he could help his family solve their problems. Aside from the non-committal answer of 'depends', it is evident that more of our respondents (38.9%) would still prefer to befriend that person, compared to those (22.0%) who would not do so.

On the whole, the ideal relationship between the family and other social groups is one characterized by (a) a minimal level of social conflict, (b) a low level of intimacy, and (c) an underscorement of the exploitative utility of the other social groups to the family.

(2) Behavioural component The normative component mentioned in the last section is also largely translated into actual behaviour by our respondents. In the case of participation in voluntary associations, only 19.6% of them had joined voluntary associations of any kind. Even among the 19.6% of the respondents who claimed to have participated, it is also possible that they were far from being active in their associations, particularly in the case of those who joined trade unions under the social pressure of their workmates. Among the joiners, those who joined two voluntary associations or less represented 89.4% of them. Among the voluntary associations joined, many were closely connected with familistic relationships (such as clan and locality associations), with the requirements of one's job (e.g., trade unions), or with one's personal needs (e.g., religious associations and recreational associations). Voluntary associations which were primarily society-oriented could claim only meagre membership.

As to the reasons for joining voluntary associations, 55.6% of the respondents claimed that it was to serve their own interests and those of their families, while only 22.2% of them had society or social interests in mind in their organizational participation. It seems that the Hong Kong Chinese families would shun involvement with other social groups so long as involvement in

them does not explicitly gratify their utilitarian interests. However, if such interests can be served through such involvement, interaction with other social groups will be undertaken.

D. Dimension IV: Relationship Between the Individual and Family to Society

Under this dimension the main issues involved are: what is the proper relationship between oneself and one's family to society? Is society a distant entity which is only remotely anchored in one's mind? Do their actual behaviour reflect faithfully what one believes in?

(1) The normative component When asked about the relative importance of one's own family and the society of Hong Kong, 36.0% of the respondents would rate their own families as more important, as against 9.6% who would name society. Nevertheless, even though society in abstract is an extraneous entity to our respondents, Hong Kong society as a geographical setting to make a living was favourably evaluated by the respondents, as 52.7% of them would still prefer to stay in Hong Kong even if opportunities arose elsewhere. Yet, they would not contemplate about transforming it to suit their own cherished ideals. Paradoxical attitudes toward society characterize the Hong Kong Chinese, and it might be that these attitudes are instrumental in allowing them to adapt

to such a paradoxical place such as Hong Kong with such a high level of success.

(2) The behavioural component At the behavioural level, it can be said that the Hong Kong Chinese are cognitively involved in society but attitudinally and affectively alienated. Our data indicate that a majority of the respondents paid attention to what happened in Hong Kong, and, among them, 62.7% even claimed that they had paid close attention to local affairs. On the other hand, their interests in society had not been translated into a high level of affective involvement in or identification with society, as 51.6% of them felt no pride at all in the achievements of some of their fellow Hong Kong citizens. Nonetheless, the compartmentalization between cognitive involvement and attitudinal and behavioural involvement can be satisfactorily explained by the conceptual framework of utilitarianistic familism, since it is pragmatically logical for an individual who wishes to 'exploit' society for the good of his family to be well-informed about society, yet he may not be interested in changing it or concerned about its well-being unless his familial interests are in jeopardy. Cognitive awareness of social happenings serves an instrumental function, and the possible conflict between cognitive awareness and absence of interventional efforts do not necessarily disturb the Hong Kong Chinese psychologically.

E. Dimension V: Relationship Between the Individual and the Political System

The main issues involved in the relationship between the individual and the political system are: how do the Hong Kong Chinese perceive the political system and what role do they attribute to the government?

(1) The normative component There is a diffuse feeling of political powerlessness among the Hong Kong Chinese, as 91.1% of our respondents, an enormously high figure, disclaimed the possession of any power to change the society of Hong Kong. Furthermore, an even higher percentage of them, 96.7%, maintained that they had no influence whatsoever on the formulation of governmental policy. These findings indicate not only that the sense of political efficacy is low among the Hong Kong Chinese, it also signifies that most of them are not much aware of any possible forms of interest articulation or interest aggregation, not to say interest representation at the governmental level. The government appears to be an invulnerable entity which controls their fate, but yet it is beyond their capability to do anything about it. In this sense traces of the subject political culture seem to be apparent, and adaptation rather than active intervention appears to be the guiding principle regulating the relationship between the government and the people.[18]

The primary role of government in society is largely conceived to be that of maintaining social stability. 57.3% of the respondents regarded the major responsibility of the government as the performance of this duty, in comparison to the 10.5% of them who would put the establishment of a democratic and equalitarian society on the top priority list of governmental responsibilities. That Hong Kong is still in a colonial status with all the concomitant political injustices does not bother the majority of the Chinese too much. If only the government can maintain social stability, it will be tolerated, and the level of political frustration among the Chinese will be within controllable limits. However, for the Chinese to be satisfied with the government, it seems that more have to be done, as 50.5% of the respondents declared that they would not consider the government to be good if the only job it could do was the maintenance of social stability.

The characteristics of the traditional Chinese political culture as depicted by both Lucien W. Pye and Richard H. Solomon turn out to be largely substantiated by the empirical findings here, particularly those connected with what they called the needs of the Chinese for dependency on authority and for political harmony, and the reluctance of the Chinese to question those in authority positions.[19] On the other hand, we can still

discern traces of activistic political proclivities among our respondents, and we can expect these tendencies to proliferate with the continual industrialization and differentiation of the Hong Kong society.

(2) The behavioural component The relatively passive political attitudes of the Hong Kong Chinese are also directly reflected in the low level of political participation which they display. An overwhelming majority of our respondents, 88.5%, reported that they had not had any discussion of public affairs at all with government officials and social leaders before, thus signifying the wide communication gap between the government and the governed. In the Urban Council elections, among those who were qualified to vote (who constituted a negligibly small percentage of the total adult population), those who actually turned out to do so were pitifully few.[20] Among our respondents, only 36.7% of them had the desire for the right to vote in these elections, and, even if they were given the right to vote, only 36.7% gave us the assurance that they would make the effort to go to the ballot box.

Statistical analysis shows that the five dimensions of utilitarianistic familism are fairly closely correlated, while the relationship between the normative and behavioural

components in each of the dimensions varies from fairly close to very close. Therefore, the characterization of the normative and behavioural patterns of the Hong Kong Chinese by means of the syndrome of utilitarianistic familism should generally be appropriate, as it seems to be able to capture the main social and political tendencies among our subjects.

Utilitarianistic Familism and Political Stability in Hong Kong

If utilitarianistic familism represents the dominant ethos of a majority of the Hong Kong Chinese, it would not fail to generate serious implications for the political stability of Hong Kong. Before delving into the fuller discourse on the relationship between the two phenomena, it is pertinent to point out in this connection that the problem of political stability in Hong Kong is a multi-faceted one, and no single theory can aspire to explain in full its variegated manifestations. The international power play factor, the political apathy of the Chinese people, the power elite in Hong Kong and other causes have usually been attributed as being conducive to political stability in the colony, and indubitably they all have their own merits in accounting for the explanandum, and our purpose is not to categorically reject their explanans status. As a matter of fact, they are essential background conditions

which we have to take into consideration in formulating our own explanatory strategy. Our sole intention in this study is grounded on a key question: Even if political movements that challenge the legitimacy of the existing political structure are rare, why is it that social and political movements with less grandiose goals occur also so infrequently? Of course it can be argued, as many observers in fact do, that the government has actually managed to satisfy the modest needs and desires of the majority of the people, making political action redundant However, a closer look at the aspirations and needs of the Hong Kong Chinese would convince one that this is really not the fact. The growing crime rates and the increasing number of petitions to the government by individuals and groups in recent years are the cases in point to refute any thesis that the people are highly satisfied. It is our contention here that the resolution of this political enigma necessitates the exploration of the normative and behavioural patterns of the subordinate people in the colony, to infer the type of social organization which tends to follow from such patterns, and lastly, to assess, through educated reasoning, the mobilization potential of the subordinate Chinese. The unearthing of the endogenous social factors that are contributory to political stability in Hong Kong represents our major preoccupation and it points to an

innovative line of investigation into this moot problem which has enamoured so many people for so long. Compared to conventional wisdoms, we feel that the arguments generated from such a fresh approach should be able to furnish more satisfactory explanations, and that this explanatory schema should be more sweeping in scope as to trigger off more research problems and cut new analytic paths. As such, the 'theory' of utilitarianistic familism is not to displace completely all current 'theories', though of course some of them have to be dismissed as too simplistic, but to refine them and to supplement them in various ways.

Under the ethos of utilitarianistic familism, what will be the typical social organization of the Hong Kong society? Needless to say the social structure of any concrete society can be conceptualized in diverse manners, depending on the basic premises and research purposes of the individual concerned. In this study, our primary riddle is political stability in Hong Kong, and the characterization of the social organization of Hong Kong will be geared to this concern.

In a society where a majority of the people subscribe to tne normative and behavioural patterns associated with utilitarianistic familism, social and political stability is maintained neither by coercion nor by consensus between the ruling minority and the

subordinate majority. Of course, both elements of coercion and consensus can be found in Hong Kong, however, the colony does not fit into either the coercion model or the consensus model as commonly postulated in Western social science literature.[21] In Hong Kong, a minimal level of coercion and consensus is involved. The amount of political, economic and military power controlled by the ruling minority is far from sufficient to enable it to exercise coercive manipulation of individual behaviour and to institutionalized complete political control. It is more appropriate to say that the political legitimacy enjoyed by the British government in Hong Kong has been granted to it by the majority of the Chinese rather than forced from the Chinese through the threat of the use of force. On the other hand, the legitimacy granted is not a broad-scoped, full-scale type of legitimacy which involves active political support from the Chinese majority. The major precondition for the conferment of legitimacy to the government centers around its ability to maintain stability in society so that individual Chinese can be left relatively uninhibited to pursue materialistic satisfactions both for themselves and for their families. As such, the major form of political support rendered to the government by the Chinese majority is not active participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies, but only passive

acquiescence in the existing political arrangements. Within a fairly broad range, the Chinese is, politically, highly tolerant, since their demand for output from government is minimal; and the ability of their families to cater to a variety of their material and psychological needs reduces the extent of politicization of social needs in the colony, with the result that the capability of the government is not excessively taxed. If there is indeed consensus between the dominant and the subordinate, it is that they have agreed upon a narrow range of goals (the necessity for social stability being the most conspicuous of them), and it is obligatory for both parties to see them accomplished. Other than this, both parties are left relatively free to pursue their own interests which might not be similar, even though the operating principle is that interests and behaviour contrary to the fulfillment of the common goals should be eschewed voluntarily by both of them, otherwise coercion from one party and revolt from the other will ensue. In this way, the minimum amount of coercive capacity available in Hong Kong is significant primarily as a buttress for the narrow range of consensus here, while, on the contrary, the narrow range of consensus legitimates the exercise of coercion whenever it is necessary. In short, political integration in Hong Kong is based neither on the granting of full legitimacy to the dominant group by

the subordinate group, nor on the congruence in cultural ethos between the two (as the Chinese and the British are distinct ethnic groups with vast cultural and social differences), nor on the submissiveness of the subordinate group in front of the horrible coercion apparatus controlled by the dominant group, but is a result mainly of reciprocal goal definition which, implicitly or explicitly, delineates the proper political obligations and rights for the two parties, and these mutual definitions touch on but a tiny portion of the total configuration of socio-political behaviour engaged in by the individuals in the colony. In a broad sense, this is political integration in a passive manner; it is neither democratic nor autocratic, but at least it is pragmatic.

The basic socio-political organization of Hong Kong, under utilitarianistic familism, is a hierarchical structure with a power elite (composed largely of the British colonists and the Chinese elites) at the top, and a mass of more or less isolated, but yet overlapping, familial groups in the bottom, but without an intermediate level of organizations (particularly voluntary organizations) mediating between them. On the whole, both the British and the Chinese elites have minimal popular support, and, as a matter of fact, their power and status are not based on mass support or mass mobilization. For a majority of the Chinese people, their interests are not

represented by the elites at the top, and they suffer from a paucity of institutionalized means or personalized avenues to make their influence felt at the highest decision-making levels. At the bottom of the hierarchical structure, there are numerous individual familial groups which, largely preoccupied with the pursuit of their own utilitarianistic interests and suspicious of other social groups, are, relatively speaking, socio-psychologically detached from each other. Even though most of the familial groups overlap with one another as they share some of their members (for example, the core member in a familial group can also be a distant member in another), the fact is that they are bounded systems in themselves and cooperative activities among familial groups are difficult to organize. As the rate of social participation of the majority of the Chinese is low, these familial groups are not united and organized by the intermediate associations for concerted action in pursuit of common interests. In other words, the objective interdependencies between individuals fostered by the industrial society of Hong Kong fails to generate the high level of 'organic solidarity' visualized by Emile Durkheim. As a matter of fact, this mass of individual familial groups are left in a position in which they are directly exposed to the power elite without being represented or mediated by larger-scale organizations, and there is a dearth of

institutionalized norms regulating mass-elite intercourse, if it ever takes place. Nevertheless, there is no large-scale, deliberate effort on the part of the power elite to manipulate the mass of familial groups. The power elite is satisfied with leaving these groups in a relatively dormant state so as to avoid any possibility of social instability. On the other hand, the elite group itself is cohesive and consensual enough, as their vested interests are tied to the maintenance of the status quo, to prevent the formation of hostile factions within it and thus is able to ward off the danger that some factions may utilize the easy accessibility to the mass familial groups to mobilize them for the sake of power struggle and hence trigger off political movements with destabilizing effects. On the part of the mass of familial groups, the absence of an intermediate level of organizations does not mean that their members are easily mobilizable and helplessly subject to whatever influence from the top. In this case, the familial groups act as powerful social control agents, potent socialization mechanisms, and mediators where all incoming information and opinions are screened and re-interpreted before they are disseminated among the members of the family. In one sense, the familial groups themselves are resistant to social or political mobilization, and hence is conducive to political stability in itself. In another sense, the relative social

isolation of the familial groups as well as the lack of intermediate level organizations prohibit the mobilization of the Chinese majority on a familial basis, as the inclusion of a large number of individual familial groups into a relatively long-term organizational system which is geared to the pursuit of some common objectives is too formidable a task for the potential leaders, if there are any. If this task could ever be accomplished, it would be a most horrible form of mass organization in view of the prior organizational basis of the familial groups.[22]

This low mobilization potential of the Chinese majority in Hong Kong is a consequence of the operation of utilitarianistic familism, and many issues which might have led to political discontent in other societies would either be dissipated through the process of self-restraint in the articulation of political demands within the individuals, or through the process of 'familization' of politics within the familial groups. 'Familization' of politics in fact is a prototypical case of social accommodation of politics, which means that many potential political issues are resolved through social channels, making use of the existing social arrangements. Consequentially, the prevalence of utilitarianistic familism leads to a drastic reduction of the number of politically relevant issues, thus lessening the popular impact on the political sphere.[23] The de-politicization

of many social or other issues, and their deployment and solution within the familial groups are extremely functional to the maintenance of the colonial regime, as they reduce the need for expanding political participation and representation which a colonial regime is ill-prepared to meet. Moreover, the lack of organization among the socially isolated familial groups prevents their easy mobilization by demagogues or other interested parties even if they have the intention to do so, and this accounts pretty well for the relative sparseness of issue-oriented social and political movements in the last several decades. If, from the perspective of the top, the political stability in Hong Kong is in large measure due to the administrative absorption of politics, then, from the perspective of the bottom, it is the social (familial) absorption of politics that contributes to the political stability of Hong Kong.

Discussion

Under the sole intention to depict in an ideal-typical way the relationship between utilitarianistic familism and political stability in Hong Kong, many conditional factors and qualifying statements have temporarily been brushed aside. However, now is the time to bring them back into the discussion so that a more realistic assessment of the prospect of political

stability in Hong Kong can be undertaken, otherwise the readers might be left with a rosy picture of the political situation in Hong Kong in which long-term stability is guaranteed by the continual existence of that socio-cultural syndrome of utilitarianistic familism.

Utilitarianistic familism is neither an 'absolute' phenomenon nor is it a fixed, unchanging one. As a matter of fact, it is contingent upon a host of other factors whose configuration more or less affects its content and intensity. Moreover, as these independent factors change, and we have reason to think that they have experienced changes in the last several decades, the distribution of utilitarianistic familism among the different sectors of the population as well as its contributory role in the maintenance of political stability will also undergo accompanying changes.

Utilitarianistic familism is a historical-situational occurrence, and many of the phenomena subsumed under this overarching concept can be understood as the adaptation of traditional socio-cultural patterns to a society made up largely of immigrants and to an economy which is dependent on the world both for its markets and for the supply of raw material (including food). As a majority of the immigrants came from the province of Kwangtung, it thus means that the Cantonese imprint is very much in evidence in Hong Kong. With the

large clan system still in vogue in Kwangtung before the Communist takeover, as compared to north China, it is not surprising to find that 'familism' can be transplanted so smoothly into the Hong Kong context among the Cantonese Chinese there.

The emergence of utilitarianistic familism in Hong Kong can be briefly explained in a sequential manner:

(1) The sudden intrusion of a huge number of refugees and immigrants since 1947 placed serious strains on the Hong Kong society and economy, and, given the small indigenous population (most of whom were also immigrants in the past), assimilation of the immigrant people by the 'localites' was out of the question. Rather, most of the immigrants had to rely on themselves in adjusting to the new environment. In this spontaneous and natural process of adjustment, with all its insecurities and psychological strains, the family system had to play a salient role.

(2) As many of the immigrants came from the rural areas, they were predominantly traditional in outlook, and, as mentioned before, familism was a major constituent element in this traditional weltanschauung. Even those arriving from towns and cities were not immune from this traditional orientation.

(3) The fact that the political status of Hong Kong is contingent upon the interplay of power politics in the

international scene and the presence of the colonial government have practically debarred the Hong Kong Chinese from any opportunity to exercise political rights and responsibilities. There are substantial limits on the amount of political power the Chinese can exercise, and the residual power which might be available is not enough to allow them to determine their fate. The futility of political participation is well understood by most Chinese people, and this is reinforced by the common understanding that the Hong Kong government is also a 'dependent' government, which means that the acquisition of governmental power by the Chinese would do more harm than good. On the other hand, the capitalistic economic institutions of the colony, coupled with the fact that the growing economy based primarily on international trade seems to be able to whet rising aspirations have managed to focus the Chinese people's attention and cravings onto the economic realm, and, along the process, have also instigated the ethos of materialism and utilitarianism among the Chinese populace.

(4) The laissez-faire policy of the government encourages economic adventures and undertakings of both the Chinese and foreign capitalists. However, for most of the Chinese capitalists, the capital which is necessary for the launching of any economic enterprise has to come from one's family and relatives. The proliferation of

small businesses (commercial firms and factories) which are family-owned and under family management testifies to the tremendous importance of the family in the economic development of Hong Kong. Sociologically speaking, the importance of the family in the economic sector reinforces its importance in the social sector.

(5) The laissez-faire policy of the Hong Kong government is also reflected in the outdated social welfare system of the colony. Even though some overhaul of the system has been evident in the last several years, still social welfare facilities are far from adequate to meet the rising welfare needs of a prospering capitalistic socio-economic system. In tackling with the large amount of unsatisfied welfare needs left behind by the formal, institutionalized welfare system, the family as an informal welfare system plays an indispensable role. To a large extent, the social and economic insecurities have been absorbed by the individual families and familial groups. Along the processes, the potential for social disturbance is lessened, while the significance of the family is also substantially enhanced.

These structural and developmental conditions have left their impact on all Chinese in Hong Kong alike, though it is heaviest on those in the lower socio-economic strata. The effects of these factors converge to foster

utilitarianistic familism among a majority of the Chinese in Hong Kong, and, as mentioned, it is most salient among the less disadvantaged.

Many of these factors have been changing rather slowly in the last several decades, and utilitarianistic familism, though diminishing gradually, is still the dominant ethos in Hong Kong. However, as most of the former refugees have settled down, the overriding importance of familism will recede, and there is reason to believe that it is receding. More importantly, the changes in the demographic composition in Hong Kong would mean that a growing proportion of the population will be made up of young people who were born in Hong Kong and who have not experienced the turmoils which their parents had witnessed, but, through westernized education, who had much more aspirations for themselves and for the society as a whole. From the data we have collected, it is very clear that the younger generation is much less utilitarianistically familistic than the older generation. Moreover, emotional appeals, particularly in view of the prevalence of social and political injustice in Hong Kong, will have more effects on them, as can be seen in the 1966 and 1967 riots where the young people played a very significant role. The gradual erosion of parental authority and the diminution of social control exercised by the families, together with the continual modernization

of Hong Kong whereby more and more demands will be directed to the decision-makers in the government, we can expect more and more emotionally-charged aggressive behaviour from the young people unless a stronger sense of identification with the Hong Kong society can be instilled in them and the governmental authority is more efficient in gratifying their aspirations.[24] In view of the fact that there is a number of conspicuous lines of social cleavage in the Hong Kong society (for example, allegiance to the Communist regime vs. allegiance to the Nationalist regime, the poor versus the rich, the Chinese versus the British), any social issue, if repeatedly unresolved, will have serious political reverberations. Under the dominance of utilitarianistic familism, there is still a minimum of consensus among the Chinese people as to the major societal goals to be sought and to be respected by all, and the government so far is capable and flexible enough to contribute to the fulfillment of those goals which fall within its jurisdiction, hence these potential social cleavages are made to become relatively dormant.[25] The inevitable decline of utilitarianistic familism in the future does not mean that the Hong Kong Chinese can be politically organized, it simply means that some of the activistic and aggressive tendencies in the Chinese culture will be more difficult to suppress, and hence bringing havoc to the society.

Footnotes

1 See, for example, Norman Miners, The Government and Politics of Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 29-39; Ambrose Yeo-chi King, The Political Culture of Kwun Tong: A Chinese Community in Hong Kong (Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972); Stan Shively, Political Orientations in Hong Kong: A Socio-Psychological Approach (Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972); and J. Stephen Hoadley, "Hong Kong is the Lifeboat: Notes on Political Culture and Socialization." Journal of Oriental Studies, vol. 8, 1970, pp. 206-18.

2 See, for example, Miners, op. cit., pp. 185-94; Ambrose Yeo-chi King, The Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: With Special Emphasis on the City District Officer Scheme, Asian Survey, vol. XV, no. 5 (May 1975), pp. 422-439; Theordore Geiger and Frances M. Geiger, The Development Progress of Hong Kong and Singapore (Hong Kong: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1975), pp. 141-144; John Rear, "One Brand of Politics," in Keith Hopkins (ed.), Hong Kong: The Industrial Colony (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 55-139; and S.N.G. Davies, "One Brand of Politics Rekindled," Hong Kong Law Journal, vol. 7, part 1, 1977, pp. 44-84.

3 King, The Political Culture of Kwun Tong and Hoadley, op. cit.

4 Miners, The Government and Politics of Hong Kong, p. 32.

5 Ibid., p. 32.

6 Hoadley, op. cit., pp. 217-8.

7 Miners, op. cit., p. 34.

8 It is interesting here to note the Hong Kong government's interpretation of the Chinese conception of politics. In a Report of the Working Party on Local Administration, it was phrased in this way: "the traditional Chinese view of the ideal relationship between government and people. . . is analogous to that which should exist between parents

and children or between a shephard and his flock. The actions of both parties should be in strict accordance with a moral code, under which the rulers of a society, who should be men of learning, virtue and ability, must ensure that the community enjoys peace, order and security, leaving individuals free to pursue their affairs without undue governmental interference. In return, the people must impose their full trust and confidence in their rules, and have cause to oppose them only if the regime fails to provide the conditions of peace, order and security to which the community is entitled. Save for such opposition, this traditional concept does not contemplate the direct participation of the population in the organization or processes of government." (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1966). Though this self-complacent attitude of the government has weakened a little since 1967, the main thrust of the above statement can still be considered to be the working philosophy of the government.

9 The Star Ferry incident consists of a series of riotous incidents which were provoked by the Star Ferry Company's decision to raise the passenger transport fare, see Kowloon Disturbances 1966: Report of Commission of Inquiry (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1967).

10 In the last couple of years, groups, largely from the lower sectors of society, sharing some specific common grievances had launched a variety of petition activities, the targets of which were the government departments concerned. Though no politically significant social or political movements have yet been in sight, it can still be said that the under-privileged classes in the colony are becoming more adept at articulating their interests.

11 King, The Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong, op. cit., pp. 437-438.

12 S.N.G. Davies, op. cit., pp. 61-9.

13 Miners, op. cit., pp. 191-2. Since 1967, immediately after the Communist-instigated riot was over, the Hong Kong government came to realize the communication gap between the rules and the ruled, and some measures had been adopted to consult with the people and to solicit their opinion on a variety of public issues. Though nothing substantial has yet been achieved, we can still witness a gradual shift in policy priorities, which

might inevitably have some impact on the future political system of Hong Kong. A succinct presentation of recent political changes can be found in an unpublished paper of Dr. Kuan Hsin-chi of the Department of Government and Public Administration, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (1978), which is entitled "Political Stability and Change in Hong Kong."

14 The sample of respondents was derived from the sample of respondents used in the Biosocial Survey conducted by the Social Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (in cooperation with the Australian National University) in 1974. The sampling frame of the Biosocial Survey was a stratified sample with equal probability in the selection of sampling units. The resulting sample was a proportionate stratified random sample with 4,001 sampling units in the form of living quarters. In addition, a supplementary list of 1,600 addresses was also randomly drawn to replace those unsuccessful interviews in order to obtain the required number of 4,001 completed cases. At the completion of the survey, a total of 3,983 households had been successfully interviewed, and they represented cases from both the original sample and the supplementary sample.

These 3,983 completed interview cases constituted the sampling frame of our survey with one modification: cases from some of the census districts had been deleted because these census districts lay outside the urban centres of Hong Kong and Kowloon and the inclusion of them would increase substantially interview costs. A systematic sample of 735 addresses was taken from this modified sampling frame. Students from the Chinese University of Hong Kong were employed as interviewers, some of whom had accumulated considerable amount of experience from previous surveys conducted by the Social Research Centre. A total of 550 interviews was successfully completed, thus obtaining a response rate of 74.8%, which was not at all unsatisfactory given the difficulty of interviewing in Hong Kong.

Among the 550 respondents, most of them were males (59.5%), married (77.5%), largely located in the lower educational levels and in the low or moderately low income categories. Therefore, the socio-economic profile of our respondents tended to bias toward the lower ends of the social hierarchy in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, as the Chinese people who are low in socio-economic status represent the majority of the Hong Kong population, they are pivotal to the political stability of Hong Kong. We can safely assume that this

upper and middle classes in Hong Kong are ardent supporters of the status quo, the same assumption, on the other hand, cannot be made with impunity with regard to those in the lower rungs of the social hierarchy. In fact, it is the silence and resilience of the lower classes which intrigue us the most. The intensive attention to the lower class Chinese which our sample of respondents affords us should be greeted with delight rather than to be deplored with regret.

15 See Francis L.K. Hsu, Clan, Caste and Club (Princeton, N.J.: D. van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1963) p. 72; Liu, Hui-chen Wang, The Traditional Chinese Clan Rules (New York, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin Incorporated Publishers, 1959), pp. 1-3; Hu Hsien-chin, The Common Descent Group in China and Its Functions (New York, N.Y.: Viking Fund Inc., 1948); and Olga Lang, Chinese Family and Society (Archon Books, 1968, Orig. Yale University Press, 1946), pp. 12-23.

16 See, for example, Wong Fai-ming, "Modern Ideology, Industrialization, and Conjugalism: The Hong Kong Case." International Journal of Sociology of the Family, vol. 2, September 1972, pp. 139-150; and the same author's "Industrialization and Family Structure in Hong Kong." Journal of Marriage and the Family, vol. 37, November 1975, pp. 985-1000.

17 The conformity of actual values and behaviour to the Confucian stipulations is, of course, not perfect. Liu, op. cit., after an exhaustive content analysis of clan rules in a sample of Chinese genealogies, came to the conclusion that the ideal behavioural patterns demanded by these clan rules fell short of the Confucian prescriptions.

18 Despite their sense of powerlessness, we can still detect a fairly strong desire among the Hong Kong Chinese to exert influence over the government, as can be seen from the finding that 58.5% of the respondents had expressed that desire. The data, however, do not indicate the direction of this covered influence exertion: it can be in the direction of the commonweal of society, or it can be in the direction of satisfaction of one's familial interests or the minimization of the negative effects of governmental policy on these interests. Taking into consideration the meanings which all our available data will convey, the latter possibility seems to be more plausible.

19 See Lucien W. Pye, The Spirit of Chinese Politics (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), pp. 12-35; and Richard H. Solomon, Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture (Berkeley and L.A., Calif.: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 99-153.

20 For details, see J. Stephen Hoadley, "Political Participation of Hong Kong Chinese: Patterns and Trends," Asian Survey, vol. XIII, no. 6 (June 1973), pp. 604-616.

21 The consensus model is concerned primarily with a cultural explanation of political and social order. Consensus on a value system is postulated for society and this in turn exercises normative control over interaction to ensure order and stability. Within society, a state of equilibrium is the normal condition, which would be undermined only infrequently by conflict and anomie. Social conflict is viewed as pathological by this model, and is to be avoided through tighter social control and improved socialization techniques. On the other hand, social and political order, to the coercion theorists, is the outcome of the constraint of some by others in society. The nature of constraint varies, however, with the particular branch of coercion theory advocated. Explanation is thus sought in the structural dimension of society with particular emphasis on the power relationship between individuals and groups as well as the structural basis of the power concerned. Conflict and change are considered as normal rather than accidental. In recent years, many people have attempted to forge some type of synthesis between the two models, though not to much avail.

22 Recent sociological theorization has refuted the thesis advocated by the mass society theorists that alienated and isolated individuals provide the most accessible basis for mobilization in social and political movements. Instead, groups already organized and with established leadership structures constitute the powerful units of mobilization if appropriate conditions are there. As Oberschall commented after a critique of existing theories, "The minimum conditions of collective protest are shared targets and objects of hostility held responsible for grievances, hardships, and suffering, augmented in some cases by more deeply rooted sentiments of collective oppression, common interests, and community of fate. These minimum conditions give rise, however, to only short-term, localized, ephemeral outbursts and

movements of protest such as riots. For sustained resistance or protest an organizational base and continuity of leadership are also necessary. The organizational base can be rooted in two different types of social structure. The collectivity might be integrated and organized along viable traditional lines based on kinship, village, ethnic or tribal organization, or other forms of community, with recognized leaders and networks of social relations extending to its boundaries. On the other hand, the collectivity might have a dense network of secondary groups based on occupational, religious, civic, economic and other special interest associations with leaders based on prominent roles in these associations and networks of social relations following associational ties. Both of these principles of social organization, and they are by no means mutually exclusive, produce horizontal links and sentiments of solidarity within the collectivity that can be activated for the pursuit of collective goals and the formation of conflict groups." (Anthony Oberschall, Social Conflict and Social Movements. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973, p. 119.)

23 See Kuan Hsin-chi, op. cit., pp. 13-23.

24 The inference here is based on the thesis of Lucien W. Pye that "the Confucian tradition, both structurally and ideologically, created forms of authority that gained strength by denying the legitimacy of sentiments of aggression. Therefore, once this system of authority was disrupted, the problem of controlling aggression complicated the process of establishing new forms of authority." See Pye, op. cit., p. 32. The Confucian tradition was realized through the socialization processes in the Chinese families. This thesis is also useful for the understanding of the sporadic spurts of emotionalism, which are short-term in duration and largely unorganized, among the Hong Kong Chinese in the last several decades.

25 For example, our survey data show that there is no significant difference in the level of utilitarianistic familism between the majority of respondents who were against communism and the minority who were not very much against communism.