The "Hong Kong experience" : class, inequality and morality in political transition

THE 'HONG KONG EXPERIENCE': CLASS, INEQUALITY AND MORALITY IN POLITICAL TRANSITION

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1.

Talks about Hong Kong's future have turned into a 'political marathon'. Like other marathons, its has been a long, winding and rocky road — new issues keep cropping up and, in most cases, quickly become topics of heated debate either between diplomats representing the governments on the two sides of the negotiation table or among local politicians of different political persuasions. Unlike others, it is not at all clear when and where it will come to an end; 1997 has become a convenient date for political and administrative purposes, telling us very little about how life, social as well as political, would be after the change of sovereignty. But the amazing thing about these future talks is that the contentious issues always revolve mainly, if not exclusively, around the institutional arrangements of the polity and the economy. The picture of the decolonization process conjured up in these discussions seems to suggest that the crux of the matter is simply to look for a blueprint which would guarantee a convergence in the political structures of the pre-1997 British colony and the future Special Administrative Region and the maintenance of a capitalist economy in the process of returning Hong Kong to a socialist regime. The key words are 'restrained democratization' (and thus facilitates political convergence) and 'capitalism unchanged' (assuming that all parties involved, governments as well as the people of Hong Kong, will be happy). In short, the answer to all questions raised in the political debates related to Hong Kong's future is 'one country two systems', the blueprint for preserving Hong Kong's lifestyle in the process of 'decolonization without independence' (Lau 1987).

But can we conceive of the polity, or the economy, in isolation? Is it really sensible to talk about institutional design without some basic understanding of the social structure wherein economic and political institutions are embedded? This essay is an attempt to bring class analysis back into our discussion of Hong Kong's future. By doing so, we probe the social basis of the local political discourse on the future question and discuss, very briefly, the emerging political tensions in the years approaching 1997.

2.

That the promise of preserving Hong Kong's lifestyle within the institutional framework of 'one country two systems' is able to catch the imagination of the people, at least in the 1980s, and more specifically prior to the Tiananmen Incident, has a lot to do with the growth of a local identity (Baker 1983; Lui 1988) among the people of Hong Kong. In this light, the design of making Hong Kong a Special Administrative Region after 1997 is a compromise between on the one side, a straightforward change of sovereignty and, on the other, political independence. The latter has long been ruled out by default, on the grounds of political pragmatism and Chinese nationalism. However, the former arrangement is found unacceptable by the majority of the local population. Doubts and worries concerning life after 1997 are real (as revealed in emigration statistics) and are by no means confined to the middle class. The idea of 'one country two systems' was, in the context of the Sino-British Negotiations, conceived as a 'pact' to ease public anxiety — the people of Hong Kong can continue to enjoy their way of life under Chinese socialism. Whether people really have faith in the 'pact' is not our concern here (but again consult the emigration statistics). What interests us is the strong emotional appeal of the notion of the Hong Kong's way of life to the local people. To the majority of these people, the central concern is more of the freedom and opportunity of making, in their mind, a good (in both economic and cultural senses) life than grand narratives of nationalism and political development. But the definition of what constitutes a good life in Hong Kong has been changing. What we find most interesting is that the notion of 'one country two systems' is socially and ideologically embedded in what we can call the 'Hong Kong experience' — there are opportunities and, equally important, a special way of life can be found in contemporary Hong Kong. The 'Hong Kong system' is in this sense more than the political and economic blueprints of institution-building that are presumably the bones of contention on the negotiation table.

We have argued elsewhere in greater detail (Lui and Wong 1993a; Wong 1992a) that the beliefs in Hong Kong as a place of unmatched openness and opportunities — did not have an auspicious beginning. Structural changes in the society, with expanding 'room at the top', creating opportunities and facilitating upward mobility, have wrought important changes in perceptions and preferences. The 'Hong Kong experience', as generally understood, did not come to fruition until the 1970s. When we compare the relevant and comparable findings from

survey studies in the late 1960s, with those in the 1980s, we find quite dramatic changes. Table 1 shows some of these changes. (The details of the cited studies can be found in Wong 1992b.)

Table 1: Opportunities and Evaluation of Mobility in Society (%)

	Mitchell 1967	Lau 1977	Lau 1986	SI 1988
Per Cent who opted to stay in Hong Kong despite opportunity elsewhere	23	53		
Per cent who saw themselves as having higher status than parents	31		37	44
Per cent who saw themselves as having lower status than parents	36		11	12

The studies are:
    Mitchell 1967: *The Urban Family Life Survey*; source Mitchell 1969.
    Lau 1977: *Urban Hong Kong Survey*; source Lau 1982.
    Lau 1986: *Pilot Study of Social Indicators Study*; Source Lau and Wan 1987.
    SI 1988: *The Social Indicators Study 1988*; Source Lau *et al.* 1991.
Source: Wong 1992b:246-7

It is clear that in relation to the belief in Hong Kong as a land of opportunities, and to the evaluation of one's betterment as compared with one's parents, there have been significant changes. In particular, the perception of the society as providing the best environment for one's career is probably quite deeply-ingrained. The above table also shows that the proportion of those who opted to stay in Hong Kong, despite the availability of opportunities elsewhere, has more than doubled in the decade following the late 1960s. There have been changes — towards optimism and confidence — in the perception of opportunity and social advancement. But such beliefs in openness and opportunities are no doubt shaped by the changing social environment from the 1960s to the 1980s. We will discuss such changes in relation to specific findings.

    Survey findings of Mitchell's study of Hong Kong families in 1967, the year marked by the violent political riot in the post-war decades, suggest that only 16% of the respondents considered they had some or a lot of opportunities to make a successful career (Mitchell 1969:174). Half of the respondents said that there are fairly good or good chances for a working class child to work hard to become a professional (ibid:175). But

compared with survey findings from Singapore (80%), Taiwan (78%) and Malaysia (68%), the Hong Kong results show a rather strong feeling of pessimism with regard to opportunity of social mobility. This, Mitchell suggested, is connected with the downward mobility experience of a significant proportion of the population. In his rough estimation of mobility experience, Mitchell found that for the male adult population in 1967, 35% of the sons were in positions lower than their fathers (should those of agricultural background be excluded from the calculation, the proportion of sons experienced downward mobility would go up to 44%) (ibid:143-4). Furthermore, it is pointed out that 30% of the respondents had found their jobs through personal introduction, reflecting a rather closed occupational structure and personalized networks in the 1960s.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that traces of optimism were found among the young people growing up in the 1960s. A survey of local secondary school students, also carried out by Mitchell in 1967, shows that 42% of the interviewed students mentioned that personal success was very important (1972:75). Only 27% of the adult respondents in the family life survey (Mitchell 1969:238) gave the same answer. Concerning their expectation of future career, 14% of the student respondents answered 'very successful' and 49% 'above average but not very successful'. The observation of an optimistic sentiment among local youth is confirmed by another study of young people in 1969 (Podmore and Chaney 1973). Of course, we are not suggesting that starting from the early 1970s there has been a sweeping change in people's mood and attitude. As we shall see in subsequent discussion, the optimism of structural openness always goes hand in hand with a personal pragmatism and awareness of inequalities between classes. The point is that given the social structural changes and demographic transitions in post-war Hong Kong (also see Lui 1988; Salaff 1981), the discourse of 'Hong Kong experience' -- the imagery of 'home in Hong Kong' (for a migrant population settled in the colony in the years after the Japanese occupation and the civil war in China) and the popular sayings like 'Hong Kong is a place of opportunities' — was in the process of formation. By the early 1970s, Hong Kong, as people's home and as an ideological construct, was more than a 'life boat in the sea of political turmoil (and so don't rock it)'. A glimpse of the popular mentality at that time can be found in Rosen's ethnographic study of the Chinese middle class families in an affluent private housing estate called Mei Foo Sun Chuen (1976:209):

'... life in Hong Kong provides the access for individuals and their families to attain financial security, and the residents of Mei Foo represent a model for their Hong Kong brethren of how this security can be achieved. It is not that they are very wealthy, for most of them are not. It is rather the fact that most of them reached this stage of security and affluence via the long route: in flight from native homes in China across the border into Hong Kong, and up the ladder in Hong Kong from factory jobs and low-cost housing to white-collar jobs and a flat in Mei Foo. Their current lifestyle thus represents a greater security than that provided by the many isolated cases of greater financial success achieved in pre-revolutionary China or in the host territory of Singapore or Indonesia or South Viet Nam. The security offered in the Mei Foo model lies in the freedom it permits those who attain it to take some measure of control over the rest of their lives. Many will and already have become immigrants, but none will ever again be refugees.'

It should be noted that the discourse of 'Hong Kong experience' does not develop in a vacuum. The early 1970s was a period of a growing economy, improvement in living standard, increase in opportunity of social advancement, as well as that of rising social conflicts (Lui and Kung 1985). But then the articulation of the 'Hong Kong experience' does not presuppose an affluent society or an end of ideology. In retrospect, the emergence of collective actions and social conflicts in the 1970s marked the beginning of attempts by the Hong Kong Chinese to make their claims at the societal level. The very act of making a claim signified a farewell to the 'refugee mentality' characterized by social and political detachment in the 1950s and 1960s. Whether it was to stage a protest against government policy or to organize a demonstration demanding improvements in the social provision of social welfare, the attempts to act collectively in the public arena revealed the emergence of a new identity — they saw themselves as the Hong Kong Chinese trying to find out their social entitlements and obligations and no longer, like their parents' generation, as the Chinese in a colonial Hong Kong with a sojourner status and identity.

3.

Based upon the findings of our 'Hong Kong social mobility study 1989', Table 2 presents, adopting the class schema put forth by Goldthorpe (1987), the 'class map' of contemporary Hong Kong.[1] Class is here defined, in the light of Weberian sociological theory, in terms of 'market situation' and 'work situation' (also see Lockwood 1958; Goldthorpe 1987:40-3).

Table 2: The Class Structure of Hong Kong

7-folded Class	Brief Description	N	%	3-folded Class
I	Upper Service Class: Higher-grade professionals, administrators and officials, managers in large establishments, larger proprietors	81	8.6	
II	Lower Service Class: Lower-grade professionals, administrators, higher-grade technicians, managers in small business and industrial establishments, supervisors of non-manual employees	107	11.3	Service
III	Routine non-manual employees in commerce and administration, personal service workers and shop sales personnel	90	9.6	
IV	Petty Bourgeoisie: Small proprietors, artisans, contractors, with or without employees	132	14.0	Intermediate
V	Lower-grade technicians, supervisors of manual workers	150	15.9	
VI	Skilled manual workers	149	15.8	Working
VII	Semi-skilled and unskilled workers, agricultural workers	234	24.8	

Source: *Hong Kong Social Mobility Study* 1989

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1   The study was a Hong Kong-wide survey conducted in 1989. It covered 1,000 randomly selected male household heads aged 20 to 64. A structured questionnaire was used to carry out face-to-face interviews. For details of the survey, see WONG and LUI 1992b. Concerning questions of interviewing male household heads in class research, a useful summary of arguments from different perspectives and an interesting discussion can be found in CROMPTON 1993.

Without going into the technical details of the construction of the 'class map' (see Wong and Lui 1992b), here we would present an intergenerational mobility table constructed in accordance with the adopted class schema (see Table 3). Very briefly, Table 2 shows that about one fifth of the respondents (19.9%) can be categorized as the (both upper and lower) service classes. While the sources of the rapid expansion of the service classes are many (also see Lui and Wong 1994), it is fair to say that the major social force in shaping the rise of the professionals, managers and administrators is the phenomenal growth of the colonial economy in the post-war decades.

Table 3: Intergenerational Mobility Matrix

Father's Class/Son's Class	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Total Fathers
I	12 (30.8) [15.8]	6 (15.4) [6.4]	3 (7.7) [4.0]	4 (10.3) [4.1]	6 (15.4) [4.9]	2 (5.1) [1.7]	6 (15.4) [3.6]	39 [5.2]
II	7 (15.6) [9.2]	13 (28.9) [13.8]	4 (8.9) [5.3]	5 (11.1) [5.1]	9 (20.0) [7.3]	4 (8.9) [3.4]	3 (6.7) [1.8]	45 [6.0]
III	8 (11.1) [10.5]	15 (20.8) [16.0]	15 (20.8) [20.0]	8 (11.1) [8.2]	10 (13.9) [8.1]	9 (12.5) [7.6]	7 (9.7) [4.2]	72 [9.6]
IV	28 (11.2) [36.8]	27 (10.8) [28.7]	21 (8.4) [28.0]	43 (17.1) [43.9]	37 (14.7) [30.1]	35 (14.0) [29.7]	60 (24.0) [35.7]	251 [33.4]
V	8 (11.9) [10.5]	11 (16.4) [11.7]	7 (10.4) [9.3]	7 (10.4) [7.1]	12 (17.9) [9.8]	16 (23.9) [13.6]	6 (9.0) [3.6]	67 [8.9]
VI	6 (6.7) [7.9]	7 (7.8) [7.4]	12 (13.3) [16.0]	9 (10.0) [9.2]	11 (12.2) [8.9]	20 (22.2) [16.9]	25 (27.8) [14.8]	90 [12.0]
VII	7 (3.7) [9.2]	15 (8.0) [16.0]	13 (7.0) [17.3]	22 (11.7) [22.4]	38 (20.2) [30.9]	32 (17.0) [27.1]	61 (32.4) [36.3]	188 [25.0]
Total Sons	76 (10.1)	94 (12.5)	75 (10.0)	98 (13.0)	123 (16.4)	118 (15.7)	168 (22.3)	752 (100.0) [100.1]

Notes: figures in [ ] are column (inflow) percentages; figures in ( ) are row (outflow) percentages. Source: *Hong Kong Social Mobility Study* 1989

The marginals of Table 3, i.e. the distributions of the class positions of the fathers and the sons, can be taken as some approximate indicator of the social structure of Hong Kong in the respective time periods. We can see that there has been a significant expansion of professional, managerial and administrative positions between the two generations. The increased 'room at the top' (twice as many sons as fathers in Classes I and II) is evident; this structural change probably accounted for much of the upward mobility observed in Table 3. Table 3 shows both the effects of rapid economic development on social mobility (high inflow rates for Classes I and II) and the persistence of social inequality (lower outflow rates for positions of Classes I, II and VII) in the structuration of social class in contemporary Hong Kong. On the one hand, rapid economic development in the post-war decades has created new 'room at the top' and opportunities for people coming from different backgrounds to move into 'service class' positions. Our data suggest that 75% and 79.8% of those in Classes I and II respectively are newcomers from non-service-class background (see Tables 3). Though there are difficulties in long-range upward mobility, especially for crossing the manual/non-manual barrier (see Wong and Lui 1992b), still there are 9.2% of those of working class origin (Class VII) being able to reach Class I. However, on the other hand, social advancement is embedded in inequalities within the class structure. 46.2% and 44.4% of those coming from Class I and Class II origins respectively are able to retain their 'service class' positions. Compared with people from other class origins, they show rather strong retentiveness in retaining their privileged class positions. Meanwhile, at the other end of the class structure, the unskilled production workers show a relatively high homogeneity in both inflow and outflow perspectives. Rarely can we find unskilled manual workers coming from service class origin (5.4%); also they have difficulties in climbing up to the top positions.

Table 4: Odd Ratios (3-folded Class Schema)

Pairs of Origin	Pairs of Destination Classes Competed For		
Classes 'in Competition'	I/II	II/III	I/III
I vs II	2.0	1.8	3.5
II vs III	1.8	1.6	2.9
I vs III	3.7	2.8	10.2

Source: *Hong Kong Social Mobility Study* 1989

Class inequalities in the process of social advancement are clearly demonstrated in Table 4. It shows the odds of one class as compared with another in arriving at one destination class rather than another. From the 3-folded classification schema, we find that Class 1 (i.e. Classes I and II in the 7-folded schema, the service classes) background men have an advantage of 10.2 times over Class 3 (i.e. Classes VI and VII, the manual workers) background competitors in arriving at Class 1 rather than Class 3 destination. Such advantage, though to a less extent, is also evident in other pairs of destinations. In short, despite that rapid economic development has created new openings at the top and thus opportunities for mobility, class differentials in competition for social advancement are still significant.

4.

In the above section, we have pointed out the two sides of the Hong Kong people's mobility experience. On the one hand, there are ample opportunities brought about by economic development for social mobility. On the other, social advancement is structured by class differentials and inequalities. This explains why in the popular discourse of the 'Hong Kong experience', there are both hopes and frustrations, a belief in social advancement intermingled with a feeling of cynicism.

Our findings concerning the Hong Kong people's perception of their lives in the colony show that most of the respondents share the beliefs of Hong Kong as a place of opportunities (at least better than their parents') and of individual efforts in making success (see Table 5-a and b). There exists, as mentioned in an earlier section, an ideology celebrating Hong Kong as a place of openness and opportunities. However, when we asked our respondents whether the children of a factory worker and a business executive would have the same chance to make successful careers, 65% of them disagreed (see Table 5-c). There is an awareness of class differentials in social advancement across respondents of different classes.

Table 5: Perception of Social Issues by Class (in Percentages)

Statement	Class	Response		
		SA/A	N	D/SD
a) 'In Hong Kong, if one has abilites and tries hard, one will be successful'	I	74	14	12
	II	62	20	18
	III	71	10	19
	IV	81	5	14
	V	73	10	17
	VI	75	8	17
	VII	74	11	15
		Better	No Diff	Poorer
b) 'If you are to compare yourself with your parents generation, what would you say their chance is?'	I	25	6	69
	II	20	7	73
	III	14	7	79
	IV	12	6	82
	V	15	11	74
	VI	12	11	77
	VII	16	13	71
		SA/A	N	D/SD
c) 'Would you agree to the view that in Hong Kong, the child of a factory worker has much the same the chance to get ahead as the child of a business executive?'	I	36	12	52
	II	26	9	65
	III	31	5	64
	IV	31	5	64
	V	28	6	66
	VI	26	4	70
	VII	26	7	67
d) 'If the boss is to make a profit, he has to exploit the worker'	I	15	6	79
	II	19	17	64
	III	38	12	50
	IV	17	10	73
	V	32	16	52
	VI	45	14	41
	VII	39	21	40

Notes: SA 'Strongly agree', A 'Agree', N 'Neutral, D 'Disagree', SD 'Strongly disagree'

Table 5: Continued

Statement	Class	Response		
		SA/A	N	D/SD
e) 'There is bound to be conflict between different classes	I	63	5	32
	II	61	14	25
	III	73	6	21
	IV	67	8	25
	V	79	4	17
	VI	68	9	23
	VII	68	10	22
f) 'The influence of the big corporation on Hong Kong is too great'	I	86	8	6
	II	85	7	8
	III	93	3	4
	IV	88	4	8
	V	90	5	5
	VI	86	7	7
	VII	90	4	6
g) The average wage-earner receives less than he contributes'	I	28	21	51
	II	40	18	42
	III	53	27	20
	IV	36	12	52
	V	51	12	37
	VI	61	11	28
	VII	52	17	27
		Collectivist		Individualist
h) 'Some people say that the Hong Kong workers would be better off if they stick together and work for their common interests. Others say that the average worker would be better off if he makes greater efforts to go ahead on his own. Which view do you agree to?'	I	30		70
	II	33		67
	III	35		65
	IV	31		69
	V	35		65
	VI	38		62
	VII	45		55

Source: *Hong Kong Social Mobility Study* 1989

Indeed, co-existing with the belief in Hong Kong as a land of opportunities, there is a persistent sense of strain and injustice (also see Wong 1992; Wong and Lui 1993). 31.5% of all respondents perceived the employment relation as exploitative (Table 5-d). And when asked of their perception of class relations, 69% of them agreed that 'there is bound to be

conflict between different classes' (Table 5-e). In terms of class awareness and class identification, 80.4% of the respondents suggested that they belong to a class and most of them had a clear idea about their positions in the class structure (Wong and Lui 1992a:26-27).

As regards the allocation of economic and political resources, most respondents are rather critical of the existing system. 88.6% of the respondents agreed that 'the influence of the big corporations on Hong Kong is too great' (Table 5-f). Nearly half (48.6%) of them accepted the view that 'the average wage-earner receives less than he contributes' (Table 5-g). Of course, there are class differences in the responses to these statements. For instance, the service classes are found to be less critical of the capitalist system. But this would only support our contention of the importance of class analysis to the understanding of social and political dynamics.

Our findings clearly demonstrate that the 'Hong Kong experience' co-exists with some equally deeply-ingrained perceptions and values with regard to social inequality and social injustice. What we find most intriguing is the chasm between personal experience (the strain) and social ideology (the optimism and economically dynamic spirit). Our tentative explanation of such a phenomenon is that there are structural reasons for the co-existence of both hope and strain. Our findings have, among other things, pointed to the great amount of mobility or fluidity intergenerationally. The expansion of the 'room at the top', largely a result of rapid economic development, undoubtedly contributed to the availability of opportunities and thereby shaping the Hong Kong mobility regime (Wong and Lui 1992b; Chan, Lui and Wong 1993). The social history of that expansion and its effects on the Hong Kong people's values, ethos and morality is yet to be taken as a big agenda, for which studies utilizing different methods and time-frames are obviously needed. But pending such a study, we think it not unreasonable to say that this experience is the structural basis of the social ideology. On the other hand, our findings have also revealed significant differentials in mobility chance. Moreover, structural analysis of the mobility table suggests that there are pockets of greater rigidity in the class structure, with an invidious barrier broadly separating the non-manual and the manual classes (Wong and Lui 1992b:62-70). We cannot enter into a discussion of the implications of these findings for class formation or the demographic and socio-political characteristics of different classes. We hope however that such structural differentials could go some way to illuminating the personal experience or sense of inequality and injustice. Both openness and inequalities are

revealed in the social structure, and as people enter and benefit differently from its changes, their orientations are likewise moulded.

But more interesting is that in response to barriers and class differences, the people of Hong Kong, instead of getting organized and taking collective action as a strategy for improving their livelihood, tend to adopt an individualist strategy (see Table 5-h). When they were given a choice, they believe that they would be better off by making greater efforts to go ahead on their own than sticking together and working for common interests. Part of the reason for the choice of an individualist strategy is that few attempts have been made by local political organizations and trade unions to articulate class and class interests for collective mobilization (cf. Gallie 1983). But more important is the impact of mobility experience on the Hong Kong people's perception of openings and opportunities in a growing economy. They are not simple-minded, happy-go-lucky Horatio Alger heroes. Yet, they believe in personal efforts and that opportunities are available. The practical answer to the question of survival in economic competition is to find your own way up the social ladder.

5.

This brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this essay. The 'Hong Kong experience' comes to fruition in the 1970s when economic growth, and the concomitant changes in the social structure and increase in mobility opportunity, bring optimism and confidence. Our comparison of research findings across the post-war decades serves to highlight the change in mentality. Whereas those in the 1960s saw themselves having little control of their own careers and future, the Hong Kong people in the 1980s have hopes and dynamism. The mood is to move on, to something new, and perhaps, to some better life-station. But there are two sides of this 'Hong Kong experience'. On the one side, there are individual efforts of making better lives. In the process of making better lives, the Hong Kong people have developed a certain distinct identity, one which perceives Hong Kong as both the (or their) land of opportunities, and also a society where they have some rightful claim to entitlements. The optimism and confidence are however not something untroubled, for our findings suggest persistent strain and sense of injustice, the objective correlate of which we suggested in the mobility differentials. But that experience itself left an indelible mark on the Hong Kong morality: Hong Kong represents opportunity to make a good living, and it in that sense symbolizes freedom and openness. Whether by luck, by entrepeneurship or by bureaucratic advancement, there are opportunities of mobility (Lui and

Wong 1993b). The diverse channels of mobility and opportunity become something more than economic success; they are part of the actual experience, that actual development or formation of the Hong Kong identity, and in that process shapes the Hong Kong way of life. The freedom to be economically successful, to make a better living, become embedded in personal freedom and societal openness.

When reflected at the plane of morality, such perceptions and values are in the form of individualistic, instrumental, practical, morally-neutral orientations and strategies. This is the other side of the 'Hong Kong experience'. In their perception of the Hong Kong way of life, there is no promise of personal success. What people value is the game itself and not its outcomes. In the Hong Kong people's mind, equality is the equality of opportunity (and not of outcomes), fairness 'the more competent gets more', and competition virtuous (Lui and Wong 1994). Class differentials are recognized; but the more important question is how to move on to make a better living. There is no lack of frustration but personal failure can be forgotten and resentment has rarely turned bitter. But this instrumentalist stance, when it is extended to the larger society (and not just personal concerns and ambitions), takes on a particular meaning in the transition period. It has been remarked that the Hong Kong mood is 'one of masterly expedience and crisis-to-crisis adjustment and recovery. It is partly a gambler's mentality, partly fatalism' (Hughes 1976:129). In relation to greater events which might be politically and morally troubling, Hong Kong perseveres to carve out a small corner for herself. As Coates (1975:4) observed:

> '... [W]hile, on the other side of the border, a civil war of world importance might rage, people in Hong Kong were able to pursue their own small personal wars, undeterred by greater events. To anyone interested in these greater events, life in Hong Kong was lived in two dimensions: a large dimension, in which the individual was, like Hong Kong itself, a dot; and a small dimension, in which ridiculously small local matters seemed very important.'

In the transition period, in a similar approach, but perhaps more alarmingly, 'Hong Kong executives naturally expect to continue running their business and making money from them, while they are going through the citizenship or naturalization process' (Wilson 1990:235). The middle class coping strategy is to buy their 'political insurance' (i.e. foreign citizenship) and to continue their successful career in Hong Kong. On this side of the 'Hong Kong experience', it is an identification of Hong Kong more as a way of life than a place of residence. Emigration or no

emigration, the issue is morally neutral. This 'getting on', to make a living and perhaps a better living, shapes the Hong Kong approach to morality. The 'politically correct' line of thinking has no appeal to the public in Hong Kong. Moral rightness or wrongness (say, of emigration) is not irrelevant, but instrumentalism constitutes the framework of popular discourse.

To move on, in the eyes of the rising middle class, the entrepreneurial small business owners, or the working class whose standard of living has been improving in the past two decades, means to do well in Hong Kong. So, the 'Hong Kong experience', hopes as well as cynicism, is where the two sides of the popular mood converges.

The point we intend to make is that the preservation of the Hong Kong way of life requires more than an institutional design of 'one country two systems' in its narrow scope as we find in current political and diplomatic talks. It requires more than some additional seats in the legislature and the promise of maintaining a capitalist economic system. The key to the realization of the 'Hong Kong Dream' lies in a social system allowing individuals to pursue their own goals. While democracy (more precisely the formation of the future government) is the hot issue of political debate, people's concerns are really about liberty and freedom. Although the notion of 'capitalism unchanged' appears to have its popular support, the real issue is actually about a socio-economic system which gives rooms for individuals of different classes to strive for success through diverse channels. As Hong Kong approaches 1997, when debates about democracy must come to an end (convergence or no convergence, there will be a political structure for the Special Administrative Region (SAR) which the Chinese government finds acceptable) and talks about a capitalist SAR become more of a daily business (as the two economies are increasingly integrated), the question of the Hong Kong way of life can hardly be avoided. This is the kind of question that cannot be handled simply by political and/or economic measures, or by fiat. If one has to make a brief statement on the 1997 question, it will be a conflict between two ways of life: the 'Hong Kong experience' vs Chinese socialism.[2]

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