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Parties, Media and Public Opinion: A Study of Media's Legitimation of Party Politics in Hong Kong

Political groups have long existed in Hong Kong since 1949. The 'consultative government' was hostile towards groups which were critical of government policies. Before the 1980s, in a minimally-integrated media-political system, mass media, in compliance with the government served to undermine their legitimacy. Party politics and political parties were framed as 'dirty politics'. However, the move towards a representative government since the 1980s in face of the power transfer to China, together with the 4 June incident, have transformed the public's stance towards the newly established democratic groups. In response to the changing public opinion, the media started in the late 1980s to give consent to the emergence of party politics in the democratic system. In the first direct Legislative Council in 1991, mass media 'incorporated' party politics as part the local political system.

Throughout the hundred years of British 'colonial occupation', the people of Hong Kong had been stripped of channels for political participation. Hong Kong remained for a long time an 'administrative' rather than a 'political polity' (King, 1975). In the hands of the elites and businessmen, government policies and legislation were enhanced through a 'consultation mode of rule' (for example, Lee, 1990; Jones, 1990; King, 1975 and Hughes, 1976). However, the foreordained handover of Hong Kong back to China has accelerated the democratization process since the 1980s. Mass media showed a revulsion of public opinion in favour of party politics. Within seven years' local electoral combats, with the sustenance of mass media, political parties have been absorbed into the existing political system as legitimate forces. This study examines how media legitimized the party politics of Hong Kong in various stages of its political transition.

■ Unchallenged Regime: People's Political Indifference

Social indicators in the mid-1980s revealed that Hong Kong Chinese showed 'unconditional abhorrence to politics' (Lau and Kuan, 1988, 1986; Lau et al., 1986). Over 40 per cent of the people thought that 'democratic politics would facilitate the appearance of dangerous careerist' (Lau and Kuan, 1988:70–2). 'Democracy' was ranked considerably below social 'stability and prosperity'. People in general gave an overwhelming endorsement of the existing political system; and favoured a slow and gradual political change rather than a drastic and inexperienced one (Lau et al., 1991; Lau and Kuan, 1986). The public were said to remain politically apathetic under colonial rule (Miners, 1991; Cheng, 1989a; Kuan and Lau, 1989; Wong, 1972; Emmons, 1985; Lau, 1988, 1982, 1981, 1977; King, 1977, 1975; Hoadley, 1973, 1970; Shively and Shively, 1972). People's political indifference, however, may be partly attributed to the traditional political culture of Hong Kong Chinese (Lau and Kuan, 1985; King, 1986, 1975; King and Lee, 1981; and Hoadley, 1970). To a certain extent, it was also related to the 'paralysing sense of political powerlessness' precipitated by the long deprivation of political participation (Lau and Kuan, 1986; 1988).

■ Political Parties: Images of Factions and Danger

Political arrangements in the 1980s precluded the possibility of the existence of party politics. The establishment of political parties faced several obstacles (Lau, 1985):

1. Institutional weakness of the future legislature.
2. Difficulty in recruiting leaders and followers.
3. Hindrance of elite and party consolidation as a result of indirect election and functional representation.
4. A lack of burning ideological issues to galvanize support.
5. The persistent semi-dependent image of political leaders.
6. Alleviation of invidious competition which is a necessary condition for popular parties.
7. Suspicion about the characters of aspiring leaders.

Government officials also, openly through mass media, discredited party establishment, claiming that political parties were simply 'meaningless' to Hong Kong under the political environment (Lau, 1985).[1]

But equally important, political parties lacked public approval. People historically associated the term 'political party' with communism. Political parties conjured up images of 'confrontation, factions, totalitarianism, corruption, political plots, ideological indoctrination, closed political arenas and adversarial politics' (Kuan and Lau, 1988:78). Over 50 per cent of the people detested the existing pressure groups, fearing that their activities would endanger the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong (Lau and Kuan, 1988).

■ Political Values in Transition: State of Flux

However, the stable, hackneyed system was willy-nilly subjected to change in the course of political transition. According to the Sino-British Declaration signed in 1984, the sovereignty of Hong Kong will be regained by China on 1 July 1997. Hong Kong will become a Special Administrative Region (SAR), and can retain its autonomy for 50 years in the spirit of 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong'. The principle provides room for political participation in the coming years.

In the face of fading British authority and anxieties over the power transfer back to China, the people of Hong Kong have become more alert to politics which has resulted in a wider spectrum of views and opinions since the mid-1980s (Louie, 1991). With an attenuated anti-politics stance, people accepted the rise of political leaders (Lau and Kuan, 1986, 1988).[2] In 1986, social indicators first showed that one-third of the people believed that the emergence of political parties will 'better' the political system of Hong Kong (Lau and Kuan, 1988), and were optimistic about the chances of success of the democratic reforms. Indicators in 1988 further suggested that people preferred

☐ 1. An interview with former senior member of the two Councils, Allen Lee. See *Hong Kong Standard*, 29 December 1985. See also *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 January 1986, p. 37.

☐ 2. In 1982, although half the people were still shown as objecting to unconventional methods of political influence such as demonstrations and rallies, 'the appearance of a substantial minority in society to confer legitimacy on these radical tactics was ... not a small change' (Lau and Kuan, 1986).

the elected political leaders to the incumbent government (Lau et al., 1991). Approaching the end of the 1980s, it appeared that the people of Hong Kong became more willing to engage in politics, and showed a change of values yearning for democracy (Wong and Lui, 1992).

■ Legitimacy, Crisis and Democratization: Obstacles and Dilemma

The change of political culture of the people of Hong Kong nonetheless put the British-Hong Kong government in a dilemma. On the one hand, in the face of 'the loss of government autonomy' as a result of power transfer, the government had to harness democratic reform to cope with the legitimacy crisis (Leung, 1985; Cheung, 1988; Scott, 1989). This requires an establishment of a representative government with mass participation and even party politics, in which legitimacy is guaranteed through popular election (for example, Davies, 1989; Miners, 1989; Cheng, 1986; Wesley-Smith, 1988; Pennock, 1979; Dahl, 1976, 1971; Mayo, 1960; Lipset, 1959). Thus in 1982 Hong Kong held its maiden District Board (DB) Election. Gazetted in 1984 was *White Paper: The Further Development of Representative Government*, in which the government promised a quicker route towards democracy by introducing a number of directly elected members in 1988 and 'building up a significant number of directly elected members by 1997'. On the other hand, since the transition, Hong Kong's political reform has been objected to by China. China has persistently been opposing the inclusion of the middle class and grassroots into the system for power by means of direct election (Scott, 1989). The British government eventually gave way to China, at the expense of public opinion. The 1988 direct DB Election was abandoned (Cheng, 1989a, 1989b). The democratization process thus proceeded slowly (Table 1).

■ Party Politics: From Phobia to Acceptance

Political parties finally emerged as a by-product of the democratization process in the 1990s and, more alarming, with unrivalled public support. In fact, in the early 1980s, the government's democratization strategies did not plan to accommodate the political groups, which were still considered to be illegal. Political groups had to register under the *Company Ordinance* instead of the *Societies Ordinance* (Miners: 1991:196). Even in the late 1980s, the government still exposed the

vulnerability of the 'political parties',[3] and adhered to the traditional notion that political parties in Hong Kong represented 'the image of murderous rivalry between the communists and Kuomintang'.[4] But with the change of political culture and political parties' popularity in subsequent elections, the government could no longer afford to ignore the views and support of the masses (Leung, 1990a, 1990b).

Table 1
Popular Elections in Hong Kong*

Year	*Types of Election*
1982	First District Board direct election
1985	District Board election Legislative Council election (electoral colleges and functional constituencies)
1986	Urban and Regional Councils elections
1988	District Board election Legislative Council election (electoral colleges and functional constituencies)
1989	Urban and Regional Councils elections
1991	District Board election First direct Legislative Council election (and functional constituencies)
1994	District Board election
1995	Urban and Regional Councils elections Direct Board election Direct Legislative Council election (and new functional constituencies)

* Source: Modified from Louis, 1991:60

☐ 3. See *SCMP*, 3 January 1989. The former Senior Legislative Councillor, Allen Lee said that 'political parties' success hinges on funds'.

☐ 4. See *SCMP*, 21 September 1988.

■ Mass Media and Legitimation of Party Politics

From malignity to wide support, the development of political parties was linked with mass media's legitimation. According to a functionalist perspective, mass media have long been assumed to have the power of sustaining legitimacy to social institutions (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948; Wright, 1959; Lang and Lang, 1962; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1975, 1982). Legitimacy can be defined as a value of being accepted or justified (Plano et al., 1973), and it is concerned with the perceived rightfulness of the system (Kelman, 1976; Paletz and Entman, 1978) by members of the polity (Dahl, 1985; Schaar, 1989). Legitimation of party politics is a political process that sustains the legitimacy of the party system. In the study of deviant political groups in the United States election, Shoemaker (1982:254–5) found that media legitimizes or delegitimizes political groups by the following subtle ways:

1. Structuring newsgathering routines in a way to present an overall picture of these groups.
2. Deciding which events are legitimate news stories and which are not.
3. Transmitting statements from legitimate sources that affect how a group is perceived.
4. Helping maintain political system's ideology, so it will ridicule deviant groups and support groups of the system.

Shoemaker (1984) in the same study also identified evaluation, legality, stability, and viability as the qualities for being legitimized. Weber (1964) argued that legitimacy will be ascribed to a group in terms of tradition, charisma, rationality, and legality. Studying the anti-Vietnam War activities in the US, Gitlin (1980) also emphasized the cohesiveness of the groups as an important factor for media's (de)legitimation.

The press system in Hong Kong plays different roles in legitimizing political parties and party politics in four stages. The first is the stage of party-inception. The press in this long stage legitimizes parties by transforming them from 'evils' to publicly-acceptable political entities. The second stage is that of party-development, in which the growth and expansion of formal political organizations are rationalized. The third is the stage of legitimation of party politics, in which the press not only legitimizes the parties *per se*, but also the interactions of parties as part of the institutional system during elections. After the political system has gone through the first three stages, party politics

becomes fully legitimized. Reporting on parties is then routinized in the fourth stage.

■ Methodological Note

Two newspapers, the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)* and *Ming Pao Daily News (MP)* are chosen for content analysis in this study. While the *SCMP*, the highest English circulation daily in Hong Kong, is the main channel for the government officials, *MP* is a Chinese paper circulated among highly-educated people. News, features, and commentaries related to political groups are qualitatively analysed and interpreted to re-construct media's legitimation processes. The purposive sample ensures all important days of the parties are included within the seven years of study, from January 1985 to September 1991. The news clippings are selected on an event basis from the archives of the reference library of the Radio Television Hong Kong.

■ Early Political Groups: Rise and Decline

Political groups have, in fact, existed in Hong Kong for a long time. However, not until the political transition has their struggle for legitimation paid off. The 'political parties' with the longest history in Hong Kong are the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). They have been 'technically illegal' organizations in the colony since at least 1930 (Miners, 1985).[5] After World War II, both parties nominated candidates for the first post-war Urban Council Election (Miners, 1991; Endacott, 1973, 1951). From 1952 onwards, both parties ceased putting up candidates under their own names in the elections (Miners, 1991). Local political groups also emerged in the late 1940s as voices for constitutional reform.[6] These local groups have conquered seats in elections (Miners, 1991), but their influence has been eroded since the 1970s.

□ 5. Under the terms of the law, any association which is affiliated to or connected with any organization or group of a political nature established outside Hong Kong may be refused registration by the Registrar of Societies. *Societies Ordinance*, 6.(2)(a), *Added, 28 of 1961, s. 3; Amended, 30 of 1988, s. 4.*

□ 6. Reform Club was the oldest officially recognized 'political party' established in 1949 (Miners, 1985:18; Cheng, 1984:139-44). The Civil Association, a conservative group, was also founded in 1954.

■ Pressure Groups: Groups of Political Commentary

Bona fide political parties first took their rudimentary form as pressure groups in the 1970s. They functioned to 'articulate interest' (Almond and Powell, 1966)[7] of the sectors concerned, and made 'certain claims upon other groups in society' (Truman, 1951) primarily for the grassroots or middle class in Hong Kong. These pressure groups also included the influential labour unions with political backgrounds established in that period to fight for the power of the working class.[8] One of the most salient pressure groups was Hong Kong Observers, incorporated in 1975 (Hong Kong Observers, 1983).[9] They had been active in localization, law reforms, constitutional reforms, and probes into maladministration (Davies and Roberts, 1990; Cheng, 1984; Cheung and Louie, 1991). Hong Kong Observers was one of the main proponents which demanded that Hong Kong citizens should participate in drafting the Basic Law and urged the adoption of direct election.

Bombarding the government for 'dragging feet' policies, such pressure groups, including the Observers, finally provoked the government which, in turn, set up a special committee to monitor them. Furtive steps were taken to check their growth. The media system in the 1970s was, as Kuan and Lau (1988) described it, a 'minimally-integrated media-political system'. The government had been successful through the mass media in spreading rumours about Hong Kong Observers' connection with the communists.

☐ 7. By the nature of the interests of their memberships, the attitudes of pressure groups or interest groups towards public policy is fixed. Parties, on the other hand, are governed by no such rigid determination of their attitudes (Key, 1952). Besides, the typical function of interest groups is to 'articulate interest', whereas political parties serve the broader function of 'aggregating' the articulated interests (Almond and Coleman, 1960).

☐ 8. Two major ones were the Pro-Taiwan Trades Union Council (TUC) and pro-PRC Federation of Trade Union (FTU). The FTU still had candidates in the Legislative Council Election in 1991. Their political role nowadays however was displaced by formal political parties (Pang, 1993).

☐ 9. Other pressure groups formed at this time consisted of the Hong Kong Belongers' Association, a civic group who had 'loyalty to Hong Kong'; Hong Kong People's Association, with a glorious victory in 1985 DB Election; Hong Kong Prospect Institute, whose members are local magazine editors and newspaper columnists, therefore influential to local Chinese language media; Hong Kong Christian Council; Pro-Kuomintang Anti-Communist Refugees; Revolutionary Marxists' League; and Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, a democratic group (Louie, 1991; Miners, 1991; Davies and Roberts, 1990; Cheng, 1984; HK Observers, 1983).

■ Political Changes and Groups of Political Participation

Since the mid-1980s, a 'second wave' of pressure groups in the form of formal political organizations, has emerged. Most of them stem from the grassroots level. The major difference between the 'first wave' and the superseding 'second wave' is that the latter moved from 'political commentary' to 'political participation' (Louie, 1991). Pressure groups enlarged their scope of activities and participated actively in the debate concerning the future of Hong Kong. Also, with the embarking of 'political market place' as a result of the acceleration of the 'politicization' during the political transition (King, 1986), pressure groups were inevitably lured to actively tackle the elections. New political organizations were formed in this context. The Meeting Point (MP) was established in January 1983; Hong Kong Affairs Society (HKAS) in February 1984, Hong Kong People's Association (HKPA) in November 1984, the 'centre-right' Progressive Hong Kong Society (PHKS) in February 1985, and Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL) in October 1986.

■ Legitimation: Stage of Party Inception

■ *Rationalization of Party Goals and Existence*

Mass media have begun to legitimize political parties in the 1980s, although, at first, in a piecemeal manner. Between 1985 and 1990, mass media's legitimation of party politics can be characterized as a stage of party inception in which mass media rationalize the existence of the party and its goals and directions. However, without Beijing's approval, the Hong Kong government had long refused to grant legal status to parties. On the one hand, the media continued to channel government voices that disclaimed any *de facto* existence of 'political parties'[10] in order to avoid any sensitive developments during the transition. News related to parties rarely appeared in the press. If so, although acknowledging that 'political groups ponder new roles' under democratization,[11] the press tended to stay in line with the Hong Kong

□ 10. For example, the governor, Sir Youde, openly disavows the claims that the existing pressure groups are equivalent to political parties. See *MP*, 22 March 1985.

□ 11. See the commentary 'Political Groups Ponder New Roles', in *Hong Kong Standard*, 11 April 1985.

government, refusing to use the term 'political parties' to describe such 'groups'.[12]

On the other hand, the early political groups were bold enough to admit publicly that they were genuine political parties.[13] The major obstacles for their establishment were framed as a legality issue by the media. The viability of parties in future, especially after 1997, was questioned.

Discussion about political parties first flooded newspapers in the mid-1985. *MP* played an active role in defining the discourse of party politics. The paper, from May to July 1985, published a series of interviews and features probing the possibility of setting up political parties and the existence of party politics in the future. Beijing's resistance to parties was portrayed as an obstacle. *SCMP* in 1986 channelled China's official view in the words of Li Hou, who accused 'democratic parties' of 'disrupting the stability' during the transition.[14]

Despite Beijing's reservations, HKAS, MP and ADPL formed the 'liberal-democratic' camp to contest the 1988 District Board election (for example, Miners, 1991; Davies and Roberts, 1990). Many of these liberal groups later became political parties. Leaders of the political parties were equipped with experience in political participation in these groups and won popular mandate from the general public. In the 1988 election, under the banner of the 'democratic camp', such groups received wide support, specifically with endorsement from the grassroots, with over 70 per cent of the candidates successfully securing seats. With the triumph of the political groups, the media's discussion on political parties which had died down since 1985 seemed to be rejuvenated in *MP*.[15] In 1988, *SCMP* first legitimized such

☐ 12. See *MP*, 22 March 1985, under the headline, 'Governor Thinks that the Two Newly Formed Political Groups are not Political Parties'. See also *SCMP*, 15 June 1990, in which top liberals were under severe attack from former Legislative Councillor, Helmut Sohmen. Newspaper coverage of a Taiwan Legislative Yuan member in *SCMP*, 28 March 1985, also encouraged the development of political party of Hong Kong.

☐ 13. See *SCMP*, 3 March 1985. Maria Tam denied the Hong Kong Progressive Movement was a political party.

☐ 14. After the Chinese official Li Hou criticized it and said China would allow 'no party politics' in Hong Kong, the discourse on democratic parties was terminated. See *SCMP*, 4 June and 3 July 1986. See also *SCMP*, 16 March 1985, which implied that constraints to political parties came from China. The newly formed pressure groups such as ADPL, and the Association for Democracy and Justice which emerged in March 1985, were portrayed as requiring to 'explain their motives' to the local branch of the New China News Agency, the local official organ of China.

☐ 15. See, for example, *MP*, in 12 August 1988 and 12 September 1988.

political 'groups' in terms of their legality, and cited unprecedented 'encouragement' from the authoritative figure of China on the emergence of political parties.[16] The editorial of *SCMP* first suggested the 'Basic Law should settle political parties issue', and reports stressed that such political context would inevitably 'allow some [groups to] move towards parties'.[17]

Basic Law and Lobbying Groups

In parallel with the development of political parties, there also existed lobbying groups for the Basic Law, the blueprints for the Special Administrative Region (SAR). The controversy polarized the ideologies between the liberal and conservative groups, which later evolved into the contemporary parties. The two main different groups[18] were the Group of 89, composed of businessmen and professionals, representing the 'conservative' side of debates over the constitutional reform; and the Group of 190 representing the liberal-democratic camp. While the conservatives suggested minimum change to the political system of Hong Kong, liberals advocated the 'one person one vote' democracy.

However, media's perception of public interest in democratic values was low.[19] Media's legitimation on the contrary fell in line with the argument of the 'conservatives', legitimizing them in terms of their possibility of maintaining the 'prosperity and stability' of Hong Kong, rather than democratic values.[20] Liberal groups such as ADPL suggested stability and prosperity should be 'balanced' with 'democratic politics', 'independent judiciary system', and 'support for basic human rights and liberties'. But this view was not conceived to be people's priority by the media.[21] In January 1989, although a mock referendum showed that the liberal Group of 190 proposal was supported, the paper

☐ 16. See *SCMP*, 13 December 1988.

☐ 17. See editorial of *SCMP*, 6 October 1987. See also *SCMP*, 21 August 1987.

☐ 18. In 1989, the New Hong Kong Alliance, under businessmen Lo Tak-shing, one of the drafters of the Basic Law, entered the battlefield. The Group suggested a more 'conservative' bicameral legislative assembly (Davies and Roberts, 1990:320).

☐ 19. Thus in September 1988 media found the assembly of 5,000 people striving for a more democratic Basic Law to be 'exceeding the expectation'. See *MP* and *SCMP*, 19 September 1988. The demonstration was organized by Joint Committee on the Promotion of Democratic Government.

☐ 20. See *SCMP*, 26 December 1988.

☐ 21. See *SCMP*, 7 April 1986 for ADPL. See *SCMP*, 1 April 1985 for the Association for Democracy and Public Justice formed in 1985.

emphasized the low voting rate rather than the liberals' support, with the headline '[people] shun mock poll'.[22]

4 June Incident: Change of Media's Evaluation

However, the 4 June incident in 1989 transformed public values hastily and indirectly catalysed the media's legitimation of political parties. After the military crackdown in Beijing, venting their discontent and frustration towards China (Lau, 1992) and expressing their fear of loss of autonomy and democracy, the people of Hong Kong turned to the 'liberal camps'. Framing the incident as a 'communal crisis'[23] for Hong Kong, the media changed their evaluation from abhorrence to acceptance of liberal groups. *SCMP* after the incident suggested that although China is not keen on the idea of political parties being formed in Hong Kong, it has acknowledged they are an inevitable consequence of democracy. *SCMP* commented:

> ... [t]he events in China and the mass display of support for the mainland's student movement have heightened calls to increase the pace of democracy in the territory, with critics arguing that political apathy, long given as the realm for not introducing a democratic government, has given way to awareness ...[24]

The press documented polls reflecting the wide popularity of many political groups formed under the banner of 'democracy'.[25] Scholars were interviewed, and expressed optimism about parties which promoted democracy. The time for evolution of party politics was described as 'mature'. The mass media sped up the process of forming political parties. The paper said, after the 'bloodbath', the 'impediment of the Big Three [liberal groups]' was removed, and the chance for establishment of parties came. The democratic goal of political parties was legitimized. *MP* claimed that 'Hong Kong people's democratic

☐ 22. See *SCMP*, 3 January 1989.

☐ 23. See *MP*, 9 July 1989.

☐ 24. See *SCMP*, 6 August 1989.

☐ 25. In polls conducted by the *Sunday Morning Post*, a majority of four to one favoured political parties contesting the Legislative Council, even facing the censure of the Chinese authorities. See also *SCMP*, 20 August 1989.

consciousness was raised', and suggested the adoption of a less-conservative Basic Law.[26]

New Political Values and Parties—Aftermath of 4 June Incident

The 4 June incident also created another thrust for political groups. During the movement, in Hong Kong, 200 local groups streamlined to form the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement in China. The Alliance organized the territory's largest mass demonstrations with more than one million participants. The unparalleled mass mobilization and consolidation of groups swayed the public's fear towards democracy and political parties. Expedited by the coming three-tier elections, in particular, the first direct Legislative Council Election in Hong Kong, a 'third wave' of political groups emerged.[27] Some of the groups became the first genuine political parties in Hong Kong.

The territory's first fully-fledged political party was the United Democrats of Hong Kong (UDHK) inaugurated in April 1990. The UDHK was established by staunch democrats who advocated popular election of the chief executive and Legislative Council. Its leaders came mainly from three pressure groups, HKAS, MP, and ADPL. UDHK and these three groups later collaborated to contest seats in the 1991 elections. Another moderate group, the Hong Kong Democratic Foundation (HKDF) was founded in May 1990. The media framed UDHK and HKDF as 'liberals' and 'democratic leaders'.[28] UDHK, in particular, was said to pledge a 'democratic political system',[29] and the 'liberals' of UDHK were praised for working towards 'democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law' on the basis of a competitive capitalist system (See Kwok, 1991).

However, the Chinese authorities were suspicious of this new camp (Miners, 1991). Hence there emerged the conservative parties bolstered by the Beijing authorities. The leading one was the Liberal

☐ 26. See *MP*, 9 July 1989. *MP* suggested the conservative Group of 89 should 'review' their orthodox proposal.

☐ 27. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, media reports did not recognize some pressure groups as legitimate 'political parties'. See *MP*, 8 January 1990 and *MP*, 4 September 1990. These included the pro-China Association for Building a Better Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Democratic Association, organized by leading liberals.

☐ 28. See *SCMP*, 6 May 1990; 15 June 1990.

☐ 29. See *MP* and *SCMP*, 9 April 1990.

Democratic Federation of Hong Kong (LDF), founded in November 1990, and labelled 'the territory's first conservative business party'.[30] Its members were mainly from the Group of 89 and PHKS. Some other pro-Beijing groups were established, but the media did not label them as 'parties'. While the Hong Kong New Alliance, a newly launched business political group, was labelled a 'lobby group', the Pro-Beijing Hong Kong Citizen Forum was called a political 'group'[31] (see Table 2).

■ *Mass Media's Consent: Advent of Legitimate Parties*

Party formation marks the end of the party-inception stage. The mass media legitimized the advent of parties in terms of their legality and value-rationality. The legality of the parties was reflected by the media's framing of the Beijing authorities' symbolic approval. Instead of displaying the inauguration ceremony and its rituals, *SCMP* and *MP* featured 'China's top representative in Hong Kong', Zhou Nan, who 'approves' the formation of the LDF.[32] *SCMP* reported the inauguration of the pro-Beijing LDF with the headline 'blessing of the New China News Agency' (NCNA),[33] China's official organ in Hong Kong. In another report, it stressed the presence of senior Hong Kong government officials, which is symbolic of the government's approval of party politics.[34] The prominent figures enlisting the LDF were all listed.[35] The social status and influence of these figures further enhanced the legitimacy of the party.

☐ 30. Other pro-China groups included the Hong Kong Citizen Forum in January 1991; Association for the Stabilisation of Hong Kong headed by Heung Yee Kuk and rural leaders in May 1991; and Business and Professional Federation of Hong Kong formally launched in June 1991 by members of the conservative Group of 89. See *SCMP*, 4 November 1990. LDF was also framed as the 'business and professional sector's first political party'. See also *SCMP*, 2 August 1990; 23 October 1990.

☐ 31. See *SCMP*, 15 October 1990; 21 January 1991.

☐ 32. See *SCMP*, 13 September 1990. See also *MP*, 23 August 1990 in which the headline read 'LDF was offered encouragement [from Zhou]'.

☐ 33. See *SCMP*, 4 November 1990. Actually on the same day, the ceremony of the inauguration was also reported in another article, but it was less emphasized, being placed on page 13. See also *SCMP*, 3 January 1990 and *SCMP*, 13 September 1990.

☐ 34. See *SCMP*, 2 November 1990. Former Senior Executive Councillor, Chung Sze-yuen, was said to officiate at the inauguration of the party.

☐ 35. See *SCMP*, 26 May 1990; 8 August 1990; 13 September 1990; 23 October 1990. Those who joined the party included businessmen, top community leaders, Chinese mainland officials, members of Group of 89, members of Basic Law Drafting or Consultative Committee, Hong Kong Legislative and Executive Councillors.

Table 2
Major Political Groups Before Legislative Council Election 1992

Names of Political Groups	*Formation Date*	**No. of Members*
United Democrats of Hong Kong	April 90	520
Hong Kong Democratic Foundation	May 90	340
Hong Kong Citizen Forum	January 90	20
Liberal Democratic Federation	November 90	150
The Association for Stabilization of Hong Kong	May 91	120
The Business and Professional Federation of Hong Kong	June 91	300

* Source: Fong, W. (1991, April). 'Hong Kong's Political Groups: Easy to Sprout, Difficult to Grow', *Ming Pao Monthly*, (in Chinese).

The establishment of liberal groups which lacked the Hong Kong government's and Beijing's blessings, was legitimized by the omission of opposition and implied recognition from the authorities. When UDHK and HKDF were established, no antagonism from the Hong Kong or Chinese authorities was documented. This signifies an absence of challenges.[36] The press did report the absence of delegates from the government and NCNA during UDHK's inauguration with the headline, 'liberals snubbed by key officials'.[37] However, for the liberal groups, media granted them legitimacy in terms of their value-rationality of democracy. The press included a photo portraying a famous liberal, John Sum shaking hands with the chairman, Martin

☐ 36. See *SCMP*, 12 January 1990; 20 February 1990.

☐ 37. See *SCMP*, 4 April 1990; 24 April 1990. See also *MP*, April 1990. The report was of the same emphasis.

Lee, symbolizing the general endorsement of the party's struggle for democracy. Reporting the inauguration of HKDF, *SCMP* also neglected the ceremony and emphasized the party's adherence to the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems'.[38] *SCMP* also drew an implicit comparison between the UDHK's logo and Hong Kong's post-1997 seal. Finding a resemblance between the two tokens, the paper concluded that UDHK's 'pragmatic approach to Hong Kong's future' was a reassuring feat.[39] After the parties were officially established, *MP* also removed the quotation marks when it used the term 'political parties'.[40] Commentaries from *SCMP* once again argued that the evolution of parties and their future existence were 'inevitable'.[41]

Further Legitimation: Stage of Party Development

Making of Charismatic Leaders

The legitimation stage of party-development commenced after the formation of political parties. Legitimation of parties, leaders, organizations, and activities took place in this stage. It was the period in which the parties prepare themselves for the coming elections. Nearness to the direct election facilitated the emergence of legitimate parties. *SCMP* said, '[w]ith direct elections in the Legislative Council only two years away, [p]olitical parties are slowly taking shape in Hong Kong'.[42]

Charisma in terms of personal qualities and incumbency of the members was a factor leading to legitimacy of liberal leaders long before the official party inaugurations. Since 1985, for instance, the incumbent Executive Councillor and, later, the leading figure of the LDF, Maria Tam, had always been depicted as a formal, authoritative spokesperson of the PHKS, and she was commonly regarded as an expert on the development of other political groups.[43] Dating back to the drafting of the Basic Law, liberal and incumbent Legislative

☐ 38. See *SCMP*, 12 January 1990.

☐ 39. See *SCMP*, 5 April 1990.

☐ 40. Compare news coverage of *MP* before and after 9 April 1990, the date of its formation.

☐ 41. See *SCMP*, 13 January 1991.

☐ 42. See *SCMP*, 13 May 1989.

☐ 43. See *SCMP*, 1 April 1985.

Councillor, Martin Lee, was considered as the person 'leading the pro-democracy lobby'.[44] He was also described as 'the territory's best known democrat', while the vice-chairman, Szeto Wah was reported as 'highly respected among activists traditionally associated with the liberal flagship'.[45] *SCMP* implied that if it had not been for Lee and Wah's leadership UDHK's financial support would have not be available.[46] Members of UDHK were projected with the image of 'young, male, activist, educated and with extensive experience'.[47]

■ *Image of Cohesive Organizations*

The papers also legitimized parties by presenting a cohesive and institutionalized organization of the parties. First, *MP* described UDHK as an 'immense' and 'systematic' structure with specific and formal division of labour into departments.[48] Second, the numbers of charismatic leaders and recruited members of such political groups were enumerated to demonstrate their wide support.[49] Third, the cohesion was also formed by media's presentation of the solidarity and collaboration of political leaders, parties, or their allies. Parties were described as an aggregation of various political leaders who worked towards the same goal. *SCMP* highlighted how the compromise of one of the 'Big Three' liberals contributed to the formation of UDHK. The liberal ADPL 'changed its constitution' or 'got ready to disband',[50] so as to allow its members to join UDHK which worked towards democracy. The framing of the backing from other political groups of similar political ideologies, and their allies strengthened the representativeness of the party.[51]

☐ 44. See *SCMP*, 5 March 1989.

☐ 45. See *SCMP*, 16 March 1990.

☐ 46. See *SCMP*, 6 August 1989.

☐ 47. See *SCMP*, 20 March 1990.

☐ 48. See *MP*, 6 April 1990.

☐ 49. For example, enumeration of leaders of UDHK were found in the coverage of its inaugurated convention. See *SCMP* and *MP*, 9 April 1990.

☐ 50. See *SCMP*, 4 December 1989; 17 December 1989; 27 August 1989.

☐ 51. See *SCMP*, 9 April 1990. A long list of names and the organizations to which they belonged were published in the coverage of the convention of the party. The formation of LDF also received the support of PHKS. PHKS would even become an associate organization or affiliate of LDF. See *SCMP*, 28 August 1990.

■ *Fund-raising Under Media Shelter*

Party activities were also legitimized. The most prominent activity reported was fund-raising, for serious financial difficulties were encountered by the liberal groups. UDHK proposed to raise three to four millions by means of a ball and a lottery for the three-tier elections in 1991. The fund-raising activities of the liberal parties were portrayed as rational and proper 'pretexts' for collecting funds.[52] *SCMP* explained the necessity of the costs of different levels of elections, and how the money would be used by parties in detail.[53] *SCMP* disparaged the government's attempts to reduce the financial viability of the liberal groups by means of tax collection. It stressed collecting tax from the parties was generally not acceptable because '[this] could lead to accusations of ... discriminatory treatment'. The government was charged of leaving a legal 'loophole' for manipulation.[54]

■ *Parties as Legitimate Spokesmen*

UDHK, holding the 'opinion card', was portrayed as the legitimate spokesman of most prominent issues of Hong Kong,[55] especially issues that China was concerned with. Issues discussed included Bills of Right and the Rose Garden, that is, the construction of the Chek Lap Kok Airport.[56] LDF, which visited Peking, was also portrayed as the authoritative spokesman for the development of the new Chek Lap Kok Airport,[57] and as the representative of Hong Kong which expressed consternation at the armed crimes committed by mainlanders in Hong Kong.[58]

☐ 52. See *MP*, 13 November 1990 for background. See *SCMP*, 31 July 1990; 5 October 1990. See *SCMP*, 22 May 1990 for ADPL. See *SCMP*, 16 May 1990 for HKDF.

☐ 53. See *SCMP*, 2 December 1990.

☐ 54. ibid.

☐ 55. See *MP*, 17 November 1990. Other issues were also discussed in *MP*, 21 June 1991; 21 August 1991, and *SCMP*, 26 July 1991; 21 August 1991; 22 August 1991; 2 September 1991.

☐ 56. See *MP*, 8 June 1990; 17 November 1990.

☐ 57. See *MP*, 24 October 1990.

☐ 58. See *MP*, 14 January 1991.

Stage of Party Politics: Legitimate Co-operation and Competition

Party Politics Defined

Following the stage of party development was the stage of the legitimation of party politics in Hong Kong. Party politics involves the 'competitive interaction patterns among party units' (Eckstein, 1968), especially in the presence of an election (Schlesinger, 1985, 1968a, 1968b), or as Duverger (1963) observes, 'the forms and modes of their coexistence'. Legitimating the party politics, media at this stage rationalized party interaction, namely, party competition and co-operation in the three-tier elections in Hong Kong.

In line with Paletz and Entman's (1978) argument, electoral coverage was the dominant factor that accounts for the legitimation of party politics in the political system. The first Legislative Council direct election was the highlight of the process. The commencement of election politics marked the beginning of this stage. This period began on 14 June 1991 when candidates' nomination was reported in the media, and ended on the election day, 16 September 1991. In this election, the newly formed parties and pressure groups, comprising UDHK, LDF, Citizen Forum, the long-established pro-PRC Federation of Trade Union (FTU), MP, and ADPL, formed the first legitimate party system in Hong Kong.

Party as Image of Success

During this period, the press treated political parties as legitimate political entities, whose 'brand names' prominently appeared in newspaper headlines. Party members and political parties *per se* were always the main focus in news, features, and commentaries.[59] The term 'political parties' was associated with success in elections. News coverage and polls emphasized the important role of parties in elections, in both financial and strategic planning, as manifested in the headline

59. Starting from 14 August 1991, that is 29 days before the election, *MP* began to publish features of the candidates of the parties every day. Features of members of political groups were rarely found in the former two stages.

'Image and Party line are vital, says survey'.[60] Individual candidates were always neglected and hence disempowered.[61]

The focus of early reporting was on who would 'battle' for the position of Legislative Councillors.[62] *SCMP* ranked the relative chances of the potential candidates to be elected.[63] Rankings by voters' intended votes, and comparison among candidates were accepted as an 'objective' means to evaluate the 'chances' of candidates. *MP* tended to legitimize certain liberal candidates by predicting their 'potentiality to win'.[64] In another report, *MP* also hinted, in certain functional constituencies, 'no other [opponents'] reputation are comparable' to the reported candidate.[65] Both papers dramatized the polling results, ranking the top 10 candidates as well as parties. UDHK was said to be on top and FTU was fifth.[66] *MP* also assigned 'scores' to individual candidates as well as different parties. The emphasis of the headline was 'Who gets the highest scores?'[67] An informal poll, conducted by UDHK, was uncritically accepted by *MP* as the legitimate source to show the strength of the candidates and to legitimize its 'winning' candidates.[68]

■ *Party Co-operation: Solidarity and Cohesion*

Legitimation of co-operation and competition commenced as early as predictions of possible candidates were made. Media legitimized co-

☐ 60. See *SCMP*, 15 September 1991. The poll was conducted by the Hongkong Polling and Business Research Company.

☐ 61. See *SCMP*, 12 July 1991. An independent candidate, Chow Kit-bing, who contested the Eastern District seat, received little attention. Only three paragraphs covered the candidate. See *MP*, 16 September 1991, the election day. A sub-head emphasized independent candidates could 'mobilize no soldiers'.

☐ 62. This included the candidates of the functional and geographical constituencies. For example, see *SCMP*, 25 June 1991; 28 June 1991; 29 June 1991.

☐ 63. Potential candidates of all parties were also ranked. See *SCMP*, 11 July 1991; 27 August 1991; 10 September 1991.

☐ 64. See *MP*, 14 June 1991. For example, the headline forthrightly mentioned the candidates of UDHK, 'Lau Kong-wah and Wong Hong-chung bear the potential to win'.

☐ 65. See *MP*, 11 July 1991. The quotation suggested candidate Lau Wong-fat had no other competent opponent in the Rural Committee functional constituencies.

☐ 66. See *MP* and *SCMP*, 10 September 1991.

☐ 67. See *MP* 19 July 1991.

☐ 68. See *MP*, 8 July 1991.

operation by portraying the solidarity of the allies.[69] But all insinuated an underlying competition. The co-operation was portrayed as a necessary and inevitable means to 'join forces' to do battle.[70] For example, *SCMP* said, '[t]he United Democrats have been pressed into co-operating with Meeting Point in a bid to defeat a formidable coalition of rural forces, pro-China elements and the Liberal Democratic Federation ...'. Independent candidates, if reported, were depicted as isolated and powerless individuals without any coalition.[71]

■ *Party Competition: Normalized Conflicts*

The press tended to normalize the competition among parties, and polarized the ideological positions of parties.[72] A headline read 'political groups and direct election plotting' with a sub-head classifying the 'competitors' into three sets: 'democrats, the LDF, and leftist'. The emphasis was the 'leftists, rightists, and democrats combat'. *MP* suggested that 'UDHK [must] suppress the leftists' first to conquer seats. It tended to compare the different parties in order to foster the open rivalry.[73] Both papers tended to compare 'leftist' and 'democrat' candidates, while others were ignored. The papers also published one candidate's criticism of his opponent and the latter's response in a single article.[74] For all that, the primary competition rested only on the portrayed conflicts among and criticism of political parties, not individuals.[75] Candidates were compared and ranked in such a way that their party logos were frequently published beside their names.[76]

☐ 69. For party co-operation, see *MP*, 8 September 1991. There was a photo showing the co-operation of the allies, Martin Lee and Man Sai-cheong. See *MP*, 6 September 1991. Another pair, Ng Ming-yum (UDHK) and Wong Wai-yin (MP), were shown performing campaign activities.

☐ 70. See *MP*, 14 June 1991. The joint forces refer to the 'liberal groups' including MP and UDHK. See also *SCMP*, 1 July 1991; 15 July 1991.

☐ 71. See *SCMP*, 29 July 1991; see also *MP*, 22 August 1991 for reports of independents.

☐ 72. The report also said that radio and television 'arranged' programmes for the candidates to 'fight' each other. See *MP*, 3 August 1991.

☐ 73. See *MP*, 14 June 1991.

☐ 74. This was a common scene in this period. For example, see *MP*, 21 August 1991; 29 August 1991; 8 September 1991; 11 September 1991.

☐ 75. See *SCMP*, 30 August 1991. The headline proclaimed '[l]iberals tactics under attack.'

☐ 76. See *SCMP*, 27 August 1991; 10 September 1991.

■ Stage of Fully-Legitimized Party Politics

■ *Election Outcomes and Media Routinization*

Legitimation of parties in this period finally depended on the election outcomes. What the press stressed was which party won the election, not who got the seats. Particularly striking was the 'party-identification' factor which had a significant effect on the election outcome (Louie, 1993). The democratic camp headed by UDHK gained a landslide victory of 16 directly elected seats out of 18.[77] The remaining two were in the hands of independents. The legitimacy of the democrats were reflected in the headline 'Democrats head for landslide win'.[78] The defeat of all the pro-PRC political groups, as suggested by Leung (1993), was due to the 'anti-Communist China Syndrome' after the 4 June incident. Cheng (1990) also attributed the pro-Beijing groups' failure to China's outmoded emphasis on the prosperity of the territory above the promises of 'a high degree of autonomy' and 'self-administration' for the SAR after 1997, when, as reflected in the media, the publicly accepted value-rationality has shifted to the 'democratic values' that guided the liberals (see also Kwok, Leung, and Scott, 1992).

After the direct Legislative Council election, members of political parties who won the election entered the establishment. Political parties then possessed the legitimate right to exercise power in the establishment, and to directly influence government decision or policy-making. Then party politics is said to be heralded into a state of full legitimation. Routinization of coverage of party politics takes place. Parties at this stage prepare for the next elections.

■ *Continuing Party Politics and Political Struggle*

After the election, the role of the parties transformed from surveillance to administration. Competitions and conflicts between the democratic camp, mainly elected ones, and the conservative camp, composed of appointed officials to the Legislative Council, was aggravated. With a legitimate party politics, more new parties were founded and some existing ones reorganized. Businessmen and professionals in the Council

□ 77. In the 1991 DB Election, 110 candidates were under the banner of the 'liberals', and 81 were successful. In the Urban and Regional Councils Elections, UDHK also conquered 11 seats. It sponsored seven candidates in the 1991 DB Elections, of whom three were successful.

□ 78. See *SCMP*, 27 August 1991.

formed the Co-operative Resources Centre in October 1991, and in February 1993, metamorphosed into the Liberal Party. This group was the first in Hong Kong to use the word 'party' in its name, which was known to have gained the approval of the Chinese authorities (Ching, 1993:34). The pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DABHK), inaugurated in July 1992, replaced LDF as the strongest pro-Beijing force in Hong Kong. UDHK and MP also merged into the Democratic Party officially in October 1994. In the District Board election 1994, two new pro-Beijing groups, DABHK and Hong Kong Progressive Alliance (HKPA) formed in July 1994, one Taiwan KMT-related group, the 123 Democratic Alliance founded in March 1994, and the Liberal Party, LDF, ADPL, and Democratic Party participated in the contest[79] (Table 3). The Democratic Party beat the other parties, taking 21.6 per cent of the seats with a success rate of 56 per cent. Whether or not the media will continue to legitimize party politics in the next Legislative Council election and in elections after 1997 is an interesting question.

Table 3
Major Political Groups Before District Board Election 1994

Names of Political Groups	*Formation Date*	**No. of Members*
Democratic Party (UDHK and MP)	October 94	651 and 150 (94)
Liberal Party	February 93	1,500 (94)
Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong	July 92	56 (92)
Liberal Democratic Federation	November 90	171 (93)
123 Democratic Alliance	May 91	80 (94)
Hong Kong Progressive Alliance	July 94	—

* The parentheses shows the year when the figure was released.

☐ 79. Other new important groups included the Civil Force, Kowloon City Observers, Full Democracy Now, and United Ants. The existing three pro-China groups, Association for Stabilization of Hong Kong, The Business and Professional Federation of Hong Kong, and New Hong Kong Alliance still played an important role.

■ Conclusion

Party politics had long consorted with 'dirty politics' in the specific political context of Hong Kong. Political parties were delegitimized by the media system in the reign of the British colonial government. However, with the political transition, and above all, with the catalysing effect of the 4 June Incident, media in the late 1980s finally gave 'consent' to the existence of party politics. Political parties were legitimized in four stages. The media rationalized party goals in the stage of party inception. Legitimate parties were born with the advent of elections. In the stage of party development, the media brought to the scene cohesive parties and charismatic leaders. Political groups were sublimated into legitimate spokesmen. In the stage of party development during the 1991 first direct Legislative Council election, parties were regarded as images of success. Whereas party co-operation was associated with solidarity and unity, party competition was normalized. In the last stage of fully-legitimized party politics, the mass media 'incorporated' party politics into the local political system. Coverage of parties was then routinized.

However, the media's legitimation by no means has been inactive since the direct election in 1991. To recapitulate, the media's efforts to legitimize party politics was a direct result of popular support. However, as 1997 draws near, the normal link between popular support and media legitimation is interrupted and complicated by 'the China factor' and the change of media ownership. While party politics, especially after 1989, has been turned into a battlefield between the pro-China powers and democrats, the media have also become a party to this. On the one hand, certain media have been bought out by capitalists who have close business relationships with China (Fung and Lee, 1994). Capitalist-owned papers, which are subservient to China's pressure, may denigrate democratic groups and defend pro-China groups. However, such discriminating legitimation and delegitimation may undermine media credibility and exasperate the public. On the other hand, independent papers, which safeguard their autonomy and legitimize the democrats in accordance with public opinion, will be subject to sanctions from China. Thus, in future, the study of the media's legitimation of political parties in Hong Kong should take account of the media interactions, and the interplay between democratic forces and the Chinese authorities in the existing electoral and party system.

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