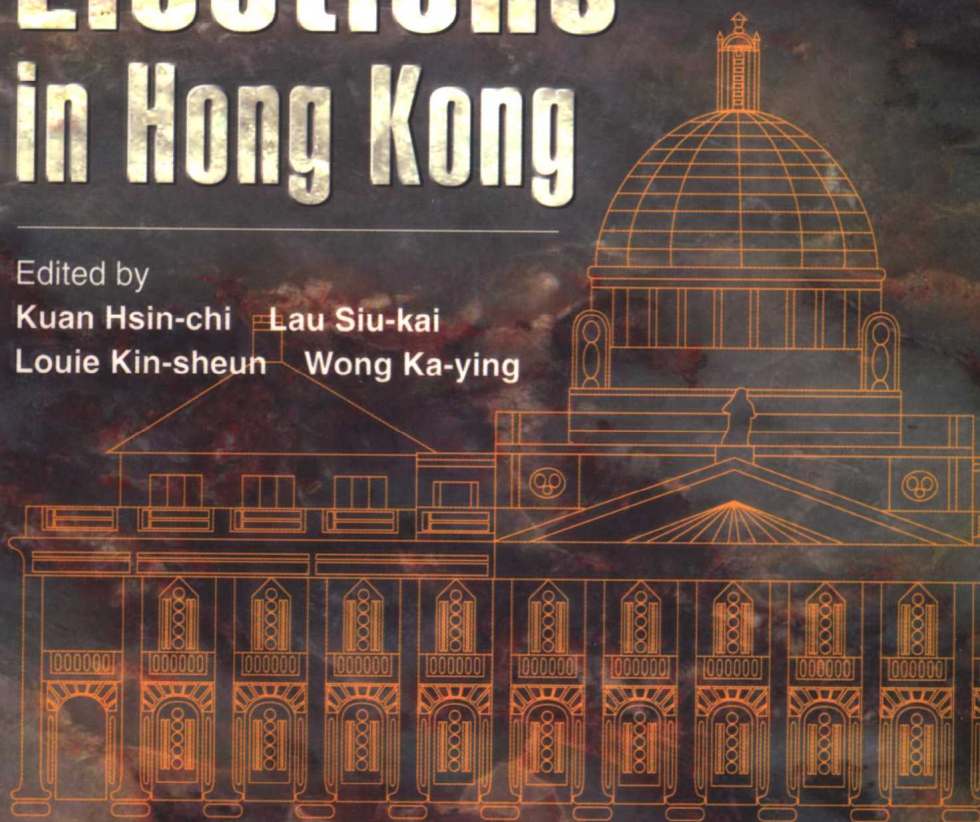


The 1995 Legislative Council Elections in Hong Kong

Edited by

Kuan Hsin-chi Lau Siu-kai
Louie Kin-sheun Wong Ka-ying



Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
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Research Monograph No. 32

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ISBN 962-441-532-3

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

Printed in Hong Kong by Authentic Advertising & Printing Company

Preface

To promote electoral studies, the Political Development of Hong Kong Research Programme of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong brought together a team of investigators from several tertiary institutions in Hong Kong to study the Legislative Council elections in 1995. A conference on the same subject was organized on May 17, 1996. Having been properly reviewed and revised, some of the papers presented are now collected in this book, together with one additional paper solicited after the said conference.

We would like to thank the Registration and Electoral Office of the Boundary and Elections Commission for the generous support they provided to our investigators. Special thanks must also go to Dr Maurice Brosseau, research officer of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, who has meticulously copy-edited the manuscripts. Warm appreciation is extended to Ms Wan Po-san and Mr Shum Kwok-cheung of the same Institute for their assistance at the conference and with the publication.

The Editors

November 1996

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Introduction

Kuan Hsin-chi

The Legislative Council elections in 1995 represent a final step in Britain's efforts to develop representative government in Hong Kong which began with the green and, then, the white paper on the subject in 1984. As in 1991,¹ the elections of 1995 did not in any way determine the formation of government. The colonial Governor is not elected, as a matter of course. His cabinet, the Executive Council, remains appointed. Unlike in the past, no member of this Council holds a concurrent membership in the Legislative Council. Well then, were Hong Kong's elections in 1995 still worthwhile? The authors here certainly think the elections were significant. First of all, the elections carried important symbolic value, as the first ever fully elected legislature was born. Notwithstanding the remaining imperfections, Hong Kong's incipient democracy seemed there to stay. Secondly, the elections were valued by the participants in the political process themselves. Thus, amidst Sino-British disagreement over Governor Patten's political (electoral) reform and repeated warnings by the Chinese government to disband the Legislative Council in July 1997, neither candidates nor voters found it a waste of time taking part in the elections. It was significant that politicians who had benefited from the appointment system in the past and could further benefit from arrangements in the old functional constituency took the trouble of contesting a seat in the geographical

constituency. Even the pro-China Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) did not boycott but actively participated in the elections. All these attested to the growing recognition of elections as the legitimate means to political representation. Thirdly, the prospect of the 1995 elections was functional in promoting the consolidation of political parties,² which in turn rendered the electoral competition in 1995 better organized than before. Fourthly, the 1995 elections were significant as a parameter of the public attitude towards the Chinese government. As demonstrated in a few chapters here, such attitudes still pretty much shaped the voters' choice.

Despite its level of significance, the 1995 elections did not bring about spectacular results. One may even submit that the elections were rather disappointing, as far as the turnout was concerned. A summary of what transpired is in order.³ First, it was not surprising that elections in the small election committee constituency registered the highest turnout rate of 99.6%, with 282 of the 283 voters voting. The election committee constituency offered 10 seats, with 18 candidates contesting. In the functional constituency elections, there were 30 seats on offer, among them nine constituencies going uncontested. A total of 61 candidates competed for the remaining 21 seats. In the contested constituencies, 460,690 out of 1,139,835 voters turned out to vote, yielding a rate of 40.4%. In the geographical constituency elections, a total of 50 candidates stood for 20 single-member electoral districts. No less than 920,567 voters went to the poll, breaking the record of Hong Kong's electoral history in terms of the absolute number of voters turning up. Yet, based on the number of registered voters, the turnout rate of 35.8% was by international standards still low.

The electoral results can be described in terms of party performance. As can be seen from Table 1, the Democratic Party emerged as the largest party in the new Legislative Council. Its electoral performance was also the best, with 25 candidates fielded and 19 seats captured. It obtained the highest rate with 41.9% of the vote in the geographical constituency elections, while all other parties trailed far behind. Here, the Democratic Party is,

Table 1 1995 Legislative Council Election Results

Affiliation*		GC	New FC	Old FC	EC	Total
DP	Candidates	15	3	4	3	25
	Seats	12	2	3	2	19
	Success rate %	80.0	66.7	75.0	66.7	76.0
	% of vote	41.9	17.0	59.6	22.2	—
LP	Candidates	1	5	8	1	15
	Seats	1	3	6	0	10
	Success rate %	100.0	60.0	75.0	0.0	66.7
	% of vote	1.6	17.3	4.7	0.0	—
DAB	Candidates	7	4	1	2	14
	Seats	2	1	1	2	6
	Success rate %	28.6	25.0	100.0	100.0	42.9
	% of vote	15.4	10.2	0.0	22.2	—
ADPL	Candidates	5	0	1	2	8
	Seats	2	0	1	1	4
	Success rate %	40.0	0.0	100.0	50.0	50.0
	% of vote	9.5	0.0	—	11.1	—
FTU	Candidates	0 [†]	6	1	0	7
	Seats	0 [†]	1	1	0	2
	Success rate %	0	16.7	100.0	0.0	28.6
	% of vote	0	12.1	1.6	0.0	—
Others [‡]	Candidates	22	17	20	10	69
	Seats	3	2	9	5	19
Total no. of candidates		50	35	35	18	138
Total seats on offer		20	9	21	10	60

Notes: * = The four parties/groups listed here were the only ones which won at least 5% of the total seats available.

GC = Geographical constituency; FC = Functional constituency;
 EC = Electoral college; DP = Democratic Party; LP = Liberal Party;
 DAB = Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong;
 ADPL = Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood;
 FTU = Federation of Trade Unions.

† = "Others" includes independent candidates too.

‡ = Chan Yuen-han (elected) and Tam Yiu-chung (defeated) are members of both the DAB and the FTU and have been counted above under the DAB.

no doubt, the most preferred party of the Hong Kong voters. Yet, the party did not command a majority in the new Legislative Council, not even with the help of its ideological kin, the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood which won four seats on the basis of an electoral strength confined to few electoral districts. The second largest party was the Liberal Party with a score of 10 seats. As a party of the old establishment, its strength clearly lay in the functional constituencies. The DAB suffered a severe setback in the sense that three of its top four leaders were defeated. Nevertheless, as a latecomer competing in an anti-China environment, this pro-China party indeed performed decently with the win of six seats. Furthermore, its presence in the new Legislative Council was structurally significant, since never before had any organized pro-China voice been represented. The new pro-China voice was to be a force to be reckoned with.

The overall concern of this book is with the ways in which the 1995 elections were influenced. The chapters are organized into three parts. Part 1 is concerned with the historical, legal, and institutional context of the elections. Part 2 offers alternative explanations for voters' choice. Part 3 has only one chapter which speculates on the kind of legislative opposition as a result of the elections.

The Context

Chapter 1 by Joseph Y. S. Cheng broadly reviews political events in Hong Kong in the 1990s, thus providing the context for understanding the elections in 1995. He notes the spirit of bargaining and the negation of "winner takes all" in the process of political development. Democracy is not valued as a way of life. People vote for the candidates of the pro-democracy camp, not in the expectation that it captures the government, but rather that it achieves some degree of checks and balances.

A more immediate context than the historical one as outlined above is none other than the various laws and regulations govern-

ing the elections. Albert H. Y. Chen presents in Chapter 2 a comprehensive overview of the legal foundation. An important message here refers to the valuable British heritage. The basic concepts, principles, rules and standards taken over from British statutory and case laws have ensured a free, open and fair election in Hong Kong. The author pleads that those positive aspects of Hong Kong's electoral laws should be preserved beyond 1997.

In Chapter 3, S. H. Lo and W. Y. Yu remind us that the electoral system matters. After a review of the evolution of the electoral system for the Legislative Council elections and persistent pressures for a change away from the existing plurality system, the authors recalculate the electoral results under different electoral systems mentioned most often in the public discourse. They conclude that a proportional representation system will inevitably reduce the number of directly elected seats obtained by the Democratic Party and encourage a proliferation of small political groups and parties. The effects of a "multi-seats, single-vote" system on the fate of the Democratic Party are less certain.

Explanations for Voters' Choice

Partisanship has been an important factor of voters' choice in established democracies. Hong Kong provides a precious occasion for the study of the emergence of partisan attachment when the party and electoral systems are still developing. But, how can one measure partisanship reliably at a time of organizational fluidity? In Chapter 4, K. S. Louie comes up with an ingenuous approach to partisanship by relying on the actual vote choice. Apart from an original contribution to concept measurement, Louie finds that not many voters were motivated by a sentiment of identification with the parties when they cast their vote in 1995.

In Chapter 5, T. W. Sun and Timothy Wong study the elections from the vantage point of the strategy of rational candidates who strive to get elected by selectively presenting themselves in terms of policy stand, leadership qualities, and other image-boost-

ing attributes. The approach is to apply content analysis to the standardized platform "Introduction To Candidates." It is found that candidates' platforms were indeed "primed" in such a way as to match the perceived interests and expectations of voters in different constituencies, geographical or functional. The second finding is even more interesting in that the elected candidates emphasized in their platforms more democratic issues whereas the defeated the transitional issues. "Priming" is however not omnipotent. For instance, in terms of the number of votes received, policy issues "primed" in the platforms were not as salient as the extent of competition in a constituency, the incumbency effect, and the party background of the candidates.

Given the June-4 legacy, the aroused aspiration for democracy and the perceived obstacles to democratization, it is not surprising that the China factor exerted an impact on the elections in 1995, as in 1991. Chapter 6 by S. W. Leung is devoted to assessing the extent to which an anti-China syndrome among the voters contributed to the electoral success of the "democrats." Three constituencies have been analysed in which the candidates from the Democratic Party were confronted by those from the DAB. The findings are mixed. In one constituency, the syndrome is the sole potent factor. In another one, it is one among many and not even the most potent one. In the third, the syndrome has no effect whatsoever. It emerges therefore that a condition that has been commonly believed to be most important in affecting voters' choice is situationally dependent, thereby confirming the fluidity of the political landscape in Hong Kong in recent years.

Similar to S. W. Leung, P. K. Li also gives, in Chapter 7, considerable emphasis to "the China factor." It is here called "the centre-periphery cleavages," i.e. a conflict between China and Hong Kong over the issues of democratization and autonomy. But apart from this, Li postulates an additional cleavage at work in the 1995 elections: "the collective-individual consumption." On the basis of these two cleavages, four domains are constructed. It is hypothesized that voters who are pro-periphery and favour a collective mode of consumption vote for the democrats, that those

who are pro-centre and have a collective mode of consumption support the leftists, and that those who are pro-centre and have an individualized mode of consumption vote for the conservatives. It turns out, however, that the democrats dominated in all four domains. Li concludes that the electoral market was distorted.

Whether the electoral market in Hong Kong is distorted or not, there are special sectors of buyers to be discovered by specialized studies. Chapter 8 by C. P. Chan and Beatrice Leung offers some findings from a preliminary analysis of the Catholic voters. Knowledge of China's records of treating Catholics in the mainland, fear of the same treatment awaiting them after 1997, exposure to the teachings of the Church, and participation in Catholic associations with social concerns have made the Catholic voters a special breed. Compared with the general voters, Catholics are found more likely to turn out to vote and to vote for democratic candidates, even after socio-economic status, sense of efficacy, political involvement and certain political attitudes have been controlled for.

Unlike the previous three chapters on the China factor, Suzanne Pepper addresses in Chapter 9 the dilemma faced by China with respect to the Legislative Council election. It pertains to a contradiction between the need to reject Britain's accelerated programme for Hong Kong's democratic transition, and an obligation to honour the gradual Basic Law approach towards that same end. China's responses were therefore paradoxical. On the one hand, China refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the election. On the other hand, pro-China candidates participated and contested it. An analysis of the campaign coverage reveals two themes. One argues that Hong Kong should not "mechanically copy" the experiences of the West in its democratic development. The other theme suggests China has to struggle against the dominant world trend of a Western conspiracy to subvert China, to which the Patten reform package for Hong Kong forms just a part. These two themes are indeed tied to China's revolutionary communist history, implying that a Chinese historical perspective is indispens-

able for a better understanding of political development in Hong Kong.

In Chapter 10, K. C. Shum offers a multivariate analysis of independent effects of determinants of the voters' turnout. A total of eight socio-economic variables, three political attitude variables and four campaign exposure variables are tested. The author has found that, all other things being equal, voters who are middle-aged, engaged in non-professional/administrative jobs, high on the scales of political efficacy, interest in politics and sense of civic duty, and exposed to interpersonal persuasion and telephone canvassing are more likely to turn out to vote.

Legislative Opposition

What kind of a legislature did the 1995 election produce? A tentative answer is given in the final chapter. There, Ernest W. T. Chui assumes that the new Legislative Council is what its members make of it. On the basis of in-depth interviews with 45 candidates to the 1995 elections (not all of them got elected though), Chui has found that this elite group is fragmented in terms of attitudes towards a number of critical issues. Together with the different basis of representation, the recruitment routes to membership, and the weak party discipline in the legislature, the future legislators will be far from unified, a condition necessary to negotiate with the government for further democratization. Since the government is not constituted on the basis of election, elected politicians in the Legislative Council can at best play a role of opposition. The opposition of a disunified elite is however bound to be ineffective.

Notes

1. For representative studies of the 1991 elections, consult Kwok, Leung and Scott (1992); Lau and Louie (1993).
2. Compare Louie (1996).

3. For a more detailed descriptive information about the elections, consult Louie and Shum (1996).

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Part 1

The Context