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# The Tiananmen Incident and the Pro-Democracy Movement in Hong Kong

JOSEPH Y.S. CHENG

**While refusing to allow any erosion of the Communist Party's monopoly of political power, the Chinese leadership has proven very skilful in meeting emerging challenges in the era of economic reform and opening to the outside world since the Tiananmen Incident. Retaining its belief that economic growth remains the key to Hong Kong's social and political stability, the Chinese government preserves the united front framework in its Hong Kong policy, with no intention of introducing genuine democracy.**

At the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama concluded that the evolution of human societies through different forms of government had culminated in modern liberal democracy.<sup>(1)</sup> China seems to have convinced the world that it will be an exception, at least in the foreseeable future. While the Chinese leadership refuses to allow any erosion of the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s monopoly of political power, it has been very skilful in meeting the emerging challenges in the era of economic reforms and opening to the outside world.

Hu Jintao and the other Chinese leaders today are well aware of the sharpening social contradictions; that is why they are now trying to build a "harmonious society" with more assistance to underprivileged groups, mainly through the establishment of a social security net. Efforts are made to maintain a better balance while avoiding undue emphasis on economic growth alone, including higher priority accorded to environmental protection, more efficient utilisation of natural resources, encouraging internal consumption, and greater dependence placed on the domestic market. The Chinese leadership also attempts to maintain a friendly international environment into the future by establishing various kinds of strategic partnerships with major world powers and offering reassurances to downplay the "China threat" perception among its Asian neighbours.<sup>(2)</sup> It is commonly recognised that these policy orientations are in the right direction. The question is how successful they will be in maintaining political stability in the absence of genuine political reform. The rapid increase in protests, riots, and mass petitions not only reflects exacerbating social contradictions in the context of the widening gap between the rich and poor, it also

demonstrates the empowerment of underprivileged groups with rising anger against corruption and abuse of power.<sup>(3)</sup>

The Tiananmen Incident in June 1989 was triggered by outrage against corruption and demands for democracy. Today's Chinese leadership still refuses to respond to calls for a reversal of the official verdict on the incident. Similarly, it suppressed discussion on the 40th anniversary of the launch of the Cultural Revolution, and imposed many restrictions on the funeral of former Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang. This pattern of behaviour reveals the government's strong sense of insecurity. It is generally believed that Beijing has been very concerned with the "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet states in recent years.

A similar situation exists in Hong Kong. Economic development alone is no longer sufficient to ensure the legitimacy of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, which confronts challenges more severe than those faced by the British colonial administration. But the Chinese leadership believes that economic growth remains the key to the territory's social and political stability. Beijing's Hong Kong policy remains within a united front framework, with no intention of introducing genuine democracy. Since the *status quo* is still satisfactory to the community, which has no intention of challenging the Chinese authorities, moderate economic growth dampens grievances

1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Free Press, 1992.
2. See the author and Zhang Wankun, "Patterns and Dynamics of China's International Strategic Behaviour," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, No. 31, May 2002, pp. 235-260.
3. Gordon G. Chang, "Halfway to China's Collapse," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 169, No. 5, June 2006, pp. 26-27.

enough to maintain stability. However, the HKSAR government lacks the legitimacy to define the priorities even in the economic and social services field. In view of Beijing's perception of threat from the pro-democracy movement, it is unlikely that it will release a timetable and roadmap to implement genuine democracy.

## The impact of the Tiananmen Incident

In the spring and summer of 1989, Hong Kong people established a very strong identity with their compatriots in China while intensely following the tragic events unfolding there. A conviction emerged that as long as freedom, human rights, and democracy could not be guaranteed in China, they could not be protected in Hong Kong after 1997. When more than one million Hong Kong people marched for democracy and freedom in China and against the suppression of the student movement on 21 May 1989, a vast majority of the participants were marching for the first time in their lives. They were motivated by anger and shock at what was happening in China, and at the same time by a sense of despair and insecurity regarding their own future. Most of them marched again on the following two Sundays. Before the crackdown in Beijing, Hong Kong people's fragile confidence was largely based on the Chinese leadership's goal of modernising China. The Hong Kong community considered this a legitimate goal widely supported by the Chinese people, and one to which Hong Kong could contribute through maintenance of the *status quo*. This was the foundation of confidence in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and various promises made by Chinese leaders to Hong Kong. The developments in China in 1989 showed that power struggles within the Chinese leadership could completely nullify this goal, and badly shook Hong Kong people's trust in the Chinese leadership, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, and the draft Basic Law. A confidence crisis emerged.

During the Sino-British negotiations on Hong Kong's future, the Chinese leaders promised the community a policy of "*gangren zhigang*" (self-administration). This greatly boosted the morale of Hong Kong's democracy advocates. After all, no one wanted Hong Kong to be ruled directly by Beijing. The Sino-British Joint Declaration, negotiated in 1984 and ratified in 1985, promised that the "current social and economic systems in Hong Kong will remain unchanged" for 50 years, a pledge welcomed by all parties.<sup>(4)</sup> Political reform, however, became a source of friction

not only between Beijing and London, but also within Hong Kong.

Some business leaders openly opposed direct elections to the Legislative Council, which the British administration proposed to introduce soon. A few even said they would prefer Hong Kong to be administered by Beijing's appointees than by individuals directly elected through universal suffrage. These businessmen believed in the Chinese leadership's determination to maintain Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, and were therefore confident that the Chinese authorities would respect and promote their interests. An elected government, accountable to the electorate and hoping to win the next election, would find it difficult to resist pressure to offer more social services, which in turn would hurt business interests.

The confidence crisis triggered by the Tiananmen Incident was well reflected in the polls. Many business leaders believed they had the experience and ability to deal with Beijing's appointees, but lacked the confidence to bargain with an elected administration. They harboured deep suspicions regarding the leaders of the pro-democracy groups. Finally, these businessmen felt that a government appointed by Beijing would be in a better position to withstand pressure from Chinese officials seeking to take advantage of Hong Kong. Unfortunately, such attitudes held by the Hong Kong business community in the mid-1980s remain largely unchanged today, and may have become even more entrenched because of China's impressive economic achievements.

On the other hand, Hong Kong's younger generation and intelligentsia argued that only an elected administration could maintain the territory's international status and promote the interests of its citizens. After 1997, substantial coordination between the central government in Beijing and the HKSAR government would become essential, and the people of Hong Kong needed a government directly accountable to them. Further, the territory's economic development would depend on the preservation of its international identity. To maintain this status and to negotiate with other governments on economic and trade issues, Hong Kong, as a special administrative region under Chinese sovereignty, needed to be accepted by the international community.<sup>(5)</sup> An opinion survey revealed that after the declaration of martial law in Beijing in May 1989, only 52 percent of

4. *A Draft Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Future of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, Government Printer, 26 September 1984, p. 12.

5. See the author's "Cause for Democracy," *South China Morning Post*, 11 December 1986.

the respondents had confidence in the future of Hong Kong, whereas the corresponding indicator was 60 percent in April 1989, and 75 percent in January of the same year.<sup>(6)</sup> In another poll after the Beijing crackdown, 37 percent of the respondents said they were actively preparing to emigrate, or had family members residing abroad to secure the right of permanent residence in a foreign country.<sup>(7)</sup> (The same series of surveys in January 1989 reported only 29 percent of respondents in the above categories.) The poll also indicated that one-third of Hong Kong's 1.55 million households were planning to emigrate. Among executives, professionals, and entrepreneurs, 64 percent planned to leave Hong Kong, 18 percent more than in January 1989.

A survey by the Federation of Hong Kong Industries conducted three weeks after the Tiananmen Incident showed that 75 percent of the manufacturers polled were either planning or considering emigration; a survey before the incident found only 40 percent in such a category.<sup>(8)</sup> Local manufacturers' confidence in the territory's future was directly affected by the changes in the China's political situation, and their investment horizons had become shorter. The subsequent waves of emigration certainly had a significant impact on Hong Kong's development.

Once superficial calm was restored in China, the leadership turned its attention to Hong Kong. The initial reaction was criticism of Hong Kong's mass media in Beijing's *People Daily* and other official media.<sup>(9)</sup> Meanwhile, Chinese leaders and official media attacked Hong Kong as a "counter-revolutionary base." Beijing's mayor, Chen Xitong, in his report to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) on the suppression of the student demonstrations, included a detailed account of Hong Kong media coverage of the incident as evidence of "collusion with foreign forces" to make China "give up the socialist road," bring China "under the rule of international monopoly capitalism," and put China "on the course of capitalism."<sup>(10)</sup>

On 11 July 1989, when the new Party General Secretary, Jiang Zemin, met leaders of the Hong Kong Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC) and the Basic Law Consultative Committee (BLCC), he warned that Hong Kong should not interfere with China. Jiang held that "according to the principle of 'one country, two systems,' China practices socialism, while Hong Kong practices capitalism. The well water should not interfere with the river water."<sup>(11)</sup> The statements of Jiang and those previously made by Chinese officials responsible for Hong Kong affairs were basically aimed at providing assurances for Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, and at warning Hong Kong

people to refrain from acts that would threaten the Chinese Communist regime.

In June and July 1989, China's official media began to criticise the activities of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China (Hong Kong Alliance). On July 21, a signed article in the *People's Daily* criticised by clear implication the Alliance's leaders, Martin Lee and Szeto Wah.<sup>(12)</sup> These accusations caused much concern. Pro-Beijing figures and leaders of the political establishment, such as the senior unofficial Legislative Councillor Allen Lee, appealed to the Hong Kong community to avoid confrontation with China. These accusations, conveyed through the local mass media, certainly had a deterrent effect on ordinary people.

## The legacies of the Tiananmen Incident

By the mid-1990s, when the Tiananmen Incident faded from memory and the Chinese economy picked up after Deng Xiaoping's famous southern tour in early 1992, many Hong Kong people demonstrated a distinct political apathy or fatigue. They were tired of the Sino-British quarrels over Governor Chris Patten's political reforms, and believed that neither party would accord priority to Hong Kong people's interests. They considered that they were the ultimate victims of the disputes, and worried that the final stage of transition might be a period of chaos and uncertainty. It seemed that both the British administration and the political parties had failed to provide them with direction. Hong Kong people often found themselves in a contradictory position as well. They despised politicians who were eager to please the Chinese authorities, and appreciated those who boldly criticised Beijing. However, they shunned confrontation with the Chinese leadership, because they knew that a deteriorating relationship with Beijing would hurt the Hong Kong

6. See *South China Morning Post*, 16 June 1989. The survey was conducted by Survey Research Hong Kong for the newspaper on 26-27 May 1989 through a random sample of 1,000 Hong Kong citizens.
7. *Ibid.*, 4 July 1989. The survey was conducted by Survey Research Hong Kong for the newspaper during 22-30 June 1989.
8. See *Ming Pao (Hong Kong)*, 6 July 1989.
9. Louise do Rosario, "Out of Reach," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 145, No. 29, 20 July 1989, p. 19.
10. For the text of the report delivered on 30 June 1989, see *Beijing Review*, Vol. 32, No. 29, 17-23 July 1989, centrefold; see especially pp. I and II.
11. See *South China Morning Post*, 12 June 1989.
12. Ai Zhong, "'Yiguo liangzhi' burong pohuai" (Sabotaging 'one country, two systems' will not be allowed), *People's Daily*, 21 July 1989. Regarding the responses of Martin Lee and Szeto Wah and other commentaries, see *Ming Pao*, 22 July 1989.

economy. Such dilemmas prompted them to “exit” from politics.

There was also, of course, the more obvious form of “exit.” From 1981-1986, around 20,000 people emigrated from the territory each year. The figure jumped to 30,000 in 1987, to 45,800 in 1988, 42,000 in 1989, 62,000 in 1990, 60,000 in 1991, and 66,000 in 1992, then fell to 53,000 in 1993, when economic difficulties in the West may have generated disincentives among local professionals. By early 1994, consulates general of Western countries in Hong Kong were reporting a decline in the number of emigration visas granted. There were also signs that an increasing number of people who had emigrated were returning to Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government estimated that at least 12 percent of individuals who had emigrated in the ten years before 1992 had already returned to Hong Kong.

Today, a rough estimate is that at least 0.7 million Hong Kong citizens hold foreign passports. They are mostly middle-class professionals and business executives. In a way, they already enjoy universal suffrage, as they exercise their foreign voting rights while in Hong Kong. The consulates general of the United States, Canada, and Australia have to make special arrangements for their citizens in Hong Kong to vote in their elections because of the large numbers involved. But these people, instead of having the “refugee mentality” of their parents and grandparents, are more likely to share a “passers-by mentality,” as they have doubts over their commitment to Hong Kong. Given their background, they naturally support democracy, but they cannot be expected to make sacrifices for the cause of democracy in Hong Kong. It is likely that their attitudes will have an impact on their second generation, who also hold foreign passports and tend to receive their tertiary education abroad.

The Chinese leadership’s warning against “well water interfering with the river water” has apparently had a lasting effect. To demonstrate the preservation of the freedom of the media in the territory after 1997, the HKSAR government wisely allows various anti-Communist publications such as *Cheng Ming* monthly and *Open Magazine* to survive, and they seem to have a bigger attraction to Mainland tourists visiting Hong Kong than to the local intelligentsia. But the real threat to the freedom of the local media has been self-censorship, which has been gradually increasing since the early 1990s.

Several factors contribute to this self-censorship. In the first place, most local media are in the hands of the territory’s major business groups, almost all of which have big business projects in China and are very reluctant to antagonise the

Chinese authorities. Worse still, in some cases these big business groups turn the media in their hands into pro-Beijing media to cultivate ties with Chinese leaders. They are even willing to allow the media to lose money in order to secure “*guanxi*” and other rewards.

The Chinese authorities, in turn, have become aware of the benefits of cultivating the local media as an important part of their united front strategy. Chinese officials of the Central Liaison Office maintain close contacts with frontline journalists, editors, and top media management. Those who are willing to co-operate are given favourable access to briefings, important officials, and meetings/conferences, as well as opportunities to make special programmes on China. Those who expose the darker sides of the Chinese regime are denied such access. Further, many owners of local media groups have been honoured with appointments to the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. These tactics have proven to be very effective.

Ties between local pro-democracy groups and pro-democracy activists inside China and in exile overseas have been weakening. Scandals and divisions among the exiles in the 1990s contributed to a serious decline in their appeal to public opinion support in Hong Kong. Activists in exile who remain loyal to the cause have been dwindling in numbers; others, such as Chai Ling, have gone into business in China. Local pro-democracy groups are short on resources, and to some extent have been deterred by the “well water-river water” warning. There is serious concern that contact with local pro-democracy activists could lead to the arrest of their counterparts in China. Moreover, local activists, especially those associated with the Hong Kong Alliance, are routinely denied the right to visit the mainland, including many pro-democracy legislators.

Local trade unionists, for example, do not attempt to offer support to their counterparts on the mainland who try to form independent trade unions, precisely because of the afore-mentioned danger. In short, local pro-democracy groups and NGOs dare not get involved in activities in mainland China that are perceived as threats by the Chinese Communist regime. There are a few exceptions. Some Christian activists have been bringing Bibles to their fellow Christians in mainland China, which is against the law. They of course do so very quietly. Falun Gong practitioners are allowed to observe their religion in the territory as long as they do not violate local law. They certainly maintain links with Falun Gong followers on the Mainland who have been suffering persecution. Groups such as Zi Teng,



Hong Kong, Victoria park: The yearly vigil in memory of the victims of June 4th.

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which offer assistance to sex workers in Hong Kong, have been able to spread their activities under low profile to China's coastal cities. Apparently their activities are not seen as posing any threat to the regime, and their services fill a vacuum, as the Chinese authorities do not officially recognise the existence of prostitution in China or the need to offer aid to sex workers.

Hong Kong affects China by its objective existence. Hong Kong's economic progress has certainly prompted mainland residents to doubt the superiority of socialism. Yet given the advance of technology and greatly improved access to information on the part of Chinese intellectuals, the effect of Hong Kong's subtle example has been in decline, though it should not to be underestimated. Leaders and professionals in Shanghai and other coastal cities, especially those who studied abroad, no longer look to Hong Kong as the source of state-of-the-art models; they look to Wall Street and European financial centres instead. Hong Kong is still a very important source of information, however, especially for those who do not have a good command of English, and those who are interested in the public opinion of overseas Chinese communities.

## The pro-democracy movement

The Tiananmen Incident destroyed the dialogue between the Chinese government and pro-democracy groups in Hong Kong. During the initial phase of the Sino-British negotia-

tions on the territory's future and their preparations, the student movement and emerging pro-democracy political groups such as the Hong Kong Observers were key targets of the Chinese authorities' united-front offensive, as there was strong resistance to the return of the colony to China among the British administration, the political establishment, and the business community. After the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the political establishment and the business community clearly recognised who their future political masters were; they valued connections with Beijing, which in turn placed top priority on the retention of investors.

This change of priority was clearly revealed by the composition of the BLDC approved by the Standing Committee of the NPC in 1985, which was heavily dominated by establishment figures. Martin Lee and Szeto Wah were the pro-democracy movement's sole representatives among the 23 Hong Kong members of the 59-member BLDC.<sup>(13)</sup> Nonetheless, before the Tiananmen Incident, officials of the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency still maintained contacts with pro-democracy groups. Though obvious differences emerged between the two on the pace and extent of democracy to be introduced in Hong Kong, the differences were considered "contradictions among the people."

13. See the author's "Hong Kong: The Pressure to Converge," *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 63, No. 2, Spring 1987, pp. 271-283.

After the Tiananmen Incident, the contradictions became those between enemies. Martin Lee and Szeto Wah resigned from the BLDC. The pro-democracy activists were the backbone of the Hong Kong Alliance, which firmly supported the activists involved in the Tiananmen Incident and played an important role in influencing international public opinion on the incident, especially in overseas Chinese communities. Worse still, after the crackdown, some members of the Hong Kong Alliance took part in the “Operation Yellow Bird” campaign to smuggle Tiananmen activists out of China in defiance of the public security apparatus.

The activities of the pro-democracy groups were the key factor for Chinese leaders labelling Hong Kong a “counter-revolutionary base.” The pro-democracy groups were also accused of “collusion with foreign forces,” i.e., the American and British imperialist forces as well as the reactionary forces in Taiwan, to destabilise the Chinese Communist regime. These perceptions were much reinforced by the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 and the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union. The pro-democracy groups in Hong Kong were then considered part of the international conspiracy to bring about “peaceful evolution” in China. In view of the improvement in relations between China and the West and the acceleration of market reforms in China in the 1990s, discussion of the international conspiracy for “peaceful evolution” was gradually toned down in China. But there have been no more official contacts with the pro-democracy groups, and accusations of pro-democracy political parties acting in “collusion with foreign forces” continue in a subdued mode, very often in the form of harsh criticisms of pro-democracy leaders in orthodox pro-Communist local publications such as *The Mirror* monthly. The Tiananmen Incident did much to promote the appreciation of democracy among Hong Kong people. To minimise Britain’s responsibility for the territory, London and the local administration supported an acceleration of the democratisation process. In May 1989, the Executive and Legislative Councils reached a consensus on direct election by universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and all seats of the legislature by 2003, with one-half of the seats of the legislature to be returned by direct election in 1997.<sup>(14)</sup> Senior Hong Kong government officials also reversed their position and indicated that the number of directly elected Legislative Council seats to be introduced in 1991 would be increased from 10 to 20. The report of the British House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee released in late June 1989 even boldly suggested that half of the Legislative Council seats should be directly elected by 1991, and all by 1995.<sup>(15)</sup> This

proposal was endorsed by the Joint Committee on the Promotion of Democratic Government, an umbrella organisation representing the various groups of the pro-democracy movement. The Joint Committee also demanded a “through train” arrangement, which meant that Legislative Councillors elected in 1995 should automatically become members of the first legislature of the HKSAR. As to the Chief Executive, the Joint Committee’s position was consistent in demanding that the post be directly elected by universal suffrage.<sup>(16)</sup>

According to an opinion poll, four out of five in the Hong Kong community favoured speedier democratic reforms, even at the risk of confrontation with the Chinese government.<sup>(17)</sup> A later survey also revealed that 64 percent of those interviewed favoured the creation of political parties to contest direct elections to the Legislative Council, while 17 percent were against it and 19 percent had no opinion.<sup>(18)</sup> For the first time since the end of 1985, the British administration, the pro-democracy movement, and public opinion were united. Nevertheless, Beijing’s position was still the crucial factor, which Britain’s Thatcher government understood well.<sup>(19)</sup>

It was in this context that Hong Kong’s Democratic Party was formed. Before this, various pro-democracy groups dared not call themselves political parties; they feared the antipathy the general public had shown toward both the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang, the only political parties in China with which they were familiar. This high tide in support of democracy in the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident was unfortunately illusory. As indicated earlier, many people chose to emigrate, and those who stayed were more willing to compromise. Hence, when Chris Patten pushed for further political reforms upon his arrival in 1992 as the last Governor, he was unable to mobilise a clear majority of the community.

In view of the ambitious plans for the rapid implementation of democracy in the territory in the summer and autumn of 1989, supporters of democracy have obviously felt betrayed

14. *South China Morning Post*, 25 July 1989.

15. The report was published in full in *South China Morning Post*, 1 July 1989.

16. *Ibid.*, 21 July 1989.

17. See *ibid.*, 3 August 1989. The survey was conducted by Inrasia Pacific Limited for the newspaper between 28 July and 1 August 1989, with a random sample of 619 respondents interviewed.

18. See *Sunday Morning Post*, 20 August 1989. The survey was conducted by Inrasia Pacific Limited for the newspaper between 8 and 14 August 1989, with a random sample of 602 households interviewed.

19. For details of Sir Geoffrey Howe’s visit to Hong Kong, see Emily Lau, “Abide with Me,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 145, No. 28, 13 July 1989.

by subsequent developments. They certainly find it unacceptable that they must wait until at least 2017 for the election of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage, and until 2020 for election of the entire legislature by that same mode.

## Article 23 legislation and Beijing's increasing intervention

A direct political legacy of the Tiananmen Incident for Hong Kong was Article 23 of the Basic Law (Hong Kong's constitution), which states: "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organisations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organisations or bodies." This article was written into the draft Basic Law after the massive protest rallies in Hong Kong during the Tiananmen Incident; obviously, the Chinese authorities were concerned with a repetition of such activities. The worry that Hong Kong might serve as a "counter-revolutionary base" in "collusion with foreign forces" was equally clear.

The C.H. Tung administration was wise enough not to initiate the controversial legislative process during his first term. In response to the open prompting of the Chinese authorities, a paper addressing the implementation of Article 23 of the Basic Law was finally unveiled for public consultation in September 2002. As expected, the proposals stirred fears of a crackdown on human rights groups and Falun Gong. The pro-democracy camp in the territory also perceived the proposals as a threat to civil liberties.<sup>(20)</sup>

The Article 23 legislation proposals triggered a political crisis in the territory. On 1 July 2003, more than half a million people took to the streets to protest against the Article 23 legislation and demand democracy. People who took part in the rally felt that they made history, and were proud of the peace and order among the protesters. They felt that the rally showed Hong Kong people at their best. This protest rally differed from the three major protest rallies in May-June 1989 during the Tiananmen Incident in two ways: this time Hong Kong people marched for a Hong Kong issue. Furthermore, during the Tiananmen Incident, there was no opposition to the demonstrators, and the pro-Beijing united front kept very quiet; but with regard to the Article 23 legis-

lation and the issue of democratisation, the local pro-Beijing united front was fully mobilised in support of the Tung administration.

The protest rally attracted much international media attention, and the Hong Kong crisis became an important issue high on the agenda of the Chinese leadership. The C.H. Tung administration and its supporters blamed the economy for the grievances of the community. The implication was that when the economy improved, the people's dissatisfaction with the government would evaporate. Further, the impact of uncontrollable external variables such as the Asian financial crisis meant that the government should not be criticised. The community, of course, perceived many failures on the part of the HKSAR government.

In the first four or five years after the 1997 handover, the Chinese leadership had exercised considerable self-restraint, as a result of which the people of Hong Kong felt a rising confidence and trust in the central authorities. The protests and demands for greater democracy that had occupied centre stage since the beginning of Tung's second term and the Article 23 legislation controversy in 2002, however, were perceived by Beijing as challenges to the very basis of the "one country, two systems" model. In their orthodox Marxist-Leninist mindset, Chinese leaders probably could not accept a scenario in which they had to surrender final control, hence the comparatively hard-line approach they have taken since the pro-democracy movement was emboldened by its strong showing in the November 2003 District Council elections and began to think of capturing half of the seats in the Legislative Council elections in the following year.

What happens when Chinese leaders believe they are being challenged? One response taking shape since the end of 2003 has been a stepping-up of direct political intervention by Beijing. Apparently the Chinese leadership was aware of Tung's incompetence and unpopularity even before his re-election in the spring of 2002, but decided to support his re-election for a number of reasons. In the first place, China's official propaganda line had been that Hong Kong was doing very well since its return to the Motherland, and replacing Tung would go against this propaganda line. Further, there had been an eagerness among Chinese leaders to show the world that local Chinese could govern Hong Kong better than the British, and replacing Tung would shatter this claim as well. Finally, finding a successor for Tung required a consultation exercise as well as mobilising support

20. *South China Morning Post*, 25 September 2002.



for the candidate. These exercises could not be conducted in secrecy and would immediately reduce the Tung administration to a lame-duck government, which would be costly to the territory's political stability and economic development. Concern for Tung's unpopularity prompted the Chinese authorities to alter the electoral arrangements so as to deter challenges to Tung's re-election in 2002. Nominations were to be open, and as Beijing's support for Tung was so obvious, members of the Election Committee felt the pressure to show their support for the Chinese leadership's candidate. As a result, more than 700 out of the 800 members of the Election Committee openly indicated their nomination of Tung. There could not be another candidate, because nomination by at least 100 members was required. Tung was therefore re-elected on an *ipso facto* basis.

Chinese leaders understood that they had to soften the opposition to Tung within the pro-Beijing united front and the business community. They therefore chose to help Hong Kong solve its economic problems. Assistance included a sharp increase in the number of tourists allowed to visit Hong Kong (the Individual Visit Scheme), the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), which gives Hong Kong better access to the China market,<sup>(21)</sup> and political pressure on Guangdong to improve co-operation with the territory. Hong Kong people appreciated the economic support from the central government, and they in general had a very good impression of the new leaders in China, namely Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. They also felt embarrassed by the fact that people enjoying a per capita annual GDP of over US\$24,000 had to seek assistance from people with a per capita annual GDP of about US\$1,000. Actually, the Hong Kong community should have been contributing to the poverty-alleviation programmes and the development of China's poor interior provinces.<sup>(22)</sup>

More important still, the heavy involvement of Chinese leaders in Hong Kong affairs further weakened the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Tung administration. Business leaders might reasonably feel that if they needed anything, they should lobby Beijing. Vice-President Zeng Qinghong also received delegations from the three pro-Beijing parties, namely, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB, now Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong), the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance, and the Liberal Party, in a high-profile manner, and praised them for their contributions to Hong Kong. This was unprecedented and may be interpreted as political intervention in support of the pro-Beijing political parties, as the Chinese authorities had refused any contact

with the territory's pro-democracy camp since the Tiananmen Incident. Further, the DAB visited the Guangdong and Shanghai authorities at roughly the same time, and could claim to assist Hong Kong by reflecting the community's views and demands to the provincial governments, a service that obviously could not be delivered by the pro-democracy camp.

The Chinese authorities had sent many agents to the HKSAR to collect information after the massive protest rally on 1 July 2003, as their confidence in the Central Liaison Office, the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, and the Tung administration had been badly shaken. It was said that all three had informed the Chinese leaders that they expected a turnout of 30,000 to 40,000 people for the protest rally. The actual turnout showed that they did not have a good understanding of the situation, and that they probably had been sending unrealistically favourable reports on the territory to the Chinese leadership all along. Some leaders in the pro-democracy camp had been contacted as well, but reports of these contacts in the media were denied. It seemed that the Chinese authorities were ready to listen to all walks of life in Hong Kong so as to better understand the situation, but they were still reluctant to grant the pro-democracy camp official recognition by engaging in a dialogue with it.

As universal suffrage and political reforms again attracted much attention from Hong Kong people because of the poor performance of the Tung administration, the pro-democracy camp even appeared to have a slight chance of capturing a majority of seats in the Legislative Council elections in September 2004. The pro-Beijing united front was thus fully mobilised. Deputies to the NPC, delegates to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and others came out to condemn the pro-democracy movement for ignoring the central government's role in the HKSAR's political reforms, and maintained that such attitudes were tantamount to advocating Hong Kong independence. Pro-democracy activists were said to be anti-China and intending to bring chaos to the territory.

Patriotism was exploited to attack the pro-democracy movement, which was accused of sinister links with the United States, the United Kingdom and Taiwan. The Chinese leadership adopted all kinds of gestures to drum up the community's patriotic feelings, such as the large-scale military parade by the local garrison on Army Day on 1 August

21. For details of CEPA, see all major newspapers in Hong Kong on 30 September 2003.

22. See the author's "Shame on Us," *South China Morning Post*, 1 September 2003.

2004, and a visit to Hong Kong by China's Olympic gold medallists just a few days ahead of the 2004 Legislative Council elections.

There were more shadowy activities as well. It was reported in the media that Hong Kong people doing business and working in the Pearl River Delta were contacted by cadres advising them to vote for pro-China candidates and not to support pro-democracy candidates. Town and township heads in China also rang up their acquaintances in Hong Kong repeating the same message. The successive resignations of three popular radio talk-show hosts before the protest rally on 1 July 2004 were widely believed to have been caused by pressure from the pro-Beijing united front, if not from the Chinese authorities. Finally, there was a prostitution case involving a Democratic Party candidate in Dongguan just before the Legislative Council elections, and the public security organ in Dongguan seemed to be involved in propaganda activities to discredit the pro-democracy camp. In sum, members of the pro-democracy camp felt they were fighting against a powerful state machinery in the elections.

The power of the pro-Beijing united front's election machinery was fully revealed in the District Council elections in November 2007. The machinery was not only obviously backed by substantial resources, it was also very sophisticated in strategies and tactics. The pro-democracy groups suffered a considerable setback in the elections. Many of the same election tactics were repeated in the District Council elections and in the Legislative Council elections in September 2008. In the latter case, the pro-democracy groups did not lose too badly, but the DAB's performance was impressive.

Survival of the pro-democracy movement is fortunately guaranteed by two factors. All parties concerned realise the importance of maintaining the rule of law and the freedom of information flow in the territory in ensuring its functioning as an international financial and business services centre. A majority of Hong Kong voters also want to ensure a minimum of checks and balances by returning pro-democracy candidates in Legislative Council elections. Despite limited financial resources and media self-censorship, the basic existence of the pro-democracy movement in the territory will not be threatened in the foreseeable future.

Better co-ordination and more serious contributions to policy studies in areas such as education and health insurance are the immediate challenges of the pro-democracy political parties, and they will be judged on this basis by their supporters and the media. In other words, they have to deliver

democracy plus; fighting for the democracy cause alone is inadequate to maintain their appeal to the majority of the voters.

## The way ahead

Samuel P. Huntington identifies five general causes of the third wave of democratisation in the late twentieth century, namely the legitimacy problem of authoritarian regimes, economic development, the spread of Christianity, the United States as a major promoter of democratisation, and the example of Eastern Europe.<sup>(23)</sup> The first two general causes are probably most relevant to the case of Hong Kong. The example of Eastern Europe caused considerable concern in the Chinese leadership in the 1990s regarding the "peaceful evolution" strategy of the Western countries, especially the United States. In the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, Hong Kong was seen as "a base of subversion" and therefore had a role to play in this "peaceful evolution" strategy; Article 23 of the Basic Law originated from this concern. The Chinese propaganda machinery and pro-Beijing publications in Hong Kong often blame the United States and the United Kingdom as "black hands" supporting the local pro-democracy movement as part of the campaign of anti-China forces. The local Catholic Church and Protestant churches are usually important elements in the territory's pro-democracy movement, and in recent years, the outspoken Roman Catholic Bishop (subsequently Cardinal) Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun in particular was criticised by the pro-Beijing united front for his strong support for the cause of democracy in Hong Kong.<sup>(24)</sup>

The legitimacy of the government is probably the key variable. The British colonial government in Hong Kong secured its legitimacy by performance; the performance of the C.H. Tung administration and the subsequent Donald Tsang administration apparently has failed to win the support of Hong Kong people. The Chinese authorities' attempt to make up for the legitimacy deficit by supporting Hong Kong's economy has been successful to some extent. Hong Kong people understand that Beijing's position has been a crucial factor in the lack of progress on democratisation, but dissatisfaction over this has been reduced to some

23. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

24. Zen announced in December 2008 that he would retire in early 2009. See Jonathan Cheng, "Hong Kong Cardinal's Departure Could Boost Beijing-Vatican Ties," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 December 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123011662076532597.html>.

extent out of gratitude for the Chinese leadership's economic assistance, and also out of reluctance to engage in political confrontation.

Opinion surveys indicate that the younger generation and the better educated segments of society maintain a stronger demand for democracy. These groups will continue to grow, and therefore an increasing proportion of the population will have a relatively strong demand for democracy in the future. The second challenge is more complicated. In some ways, economic development will reduce Hong Kong people's grievances and possibly their demand for democracy. But as the Hong Kong economy has matured, economic growth rates have declined compared with the 1970s and 1980s. Worse still, the gap between rich and poor has been widening. The territory's Gini coefficient rose from 0.451 in 1982 to 0.525 in 2001,<sup>(25)</sup> with a figure above 0.4 generally recognised as indicative of growing income disparity. This widen-

ing gap may adversely affect social stability and generate new demands on the government. In sum, the HKSAR government needs a clear mandate to engage in serious reforms to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Most likely, this mandate can only come from democracy. In other words, the maintenance of political stability will have to depend on democracy.

Meanwhile, the demonstrative effect of Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" model on Taiwan has been much reduced, and the territory's influence on political reforms in China has become limited. When the Chinese leadership has no intention of surrendering the Party's monopoly of political power, the prospects for genuine democracy in Hong Kong cannot be bright; but the local pro-democracy movement is not inclined to give up the fight for its ideals, either. •

25. *Report On Working Poverty*, by the Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty, Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, February 2006, p. 1.