

**Rhetoric of Stability and Change
The Hong Kong political double speak?**

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We analyze here a process starting in 1997, and culminating with half a million people on the street in July 2003 and the subsequent ousting of Tung Chee-Hwa, the first Chief Executive Officer of the Hong Kong SAR.

That process has led to the creation of a political discourse that can be divided in six themes. Three of them, *people power, fight for better life, and challenging authorities*, are used by the civil society, two, *stability and prosperity, Beijing principles*, by the government, and the last one, *mutual understanding*, is the everlasting common ground of any discourse in Asia.

The democratic rally of July 2003 was the largest demonstration on Chinese soil since the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, and the largest protest ever directed against the Hong Kong government itself. The current figure of protesters in the street was said to be between 500,000 and one million people.

Then, on January 1, 2004, a second protest of a smaller magnitude (between 100,000 and 300,000 people) took to the streets again. The two events came as a total surprise for the central government. Not only the size of the demonstrations was unexpected but also Beijing received no warning from the Hong Kong government that its popular support had evaporated.

At stake was a review of the development of the pace of democracy in Hong Kong upon which Tung Chee-hwa was trying to maintain a resounding silence (1). Several demonstrations followed during 2005. Few months later, Tung Chee-Hwa resigned, officially resigning for health reasons, but it was perfectly clear that his departure had been choreographed by Beijing. Later on, its unelected successor, Donald Tsang, a career civil servant had the indignity to see his package of pseudo-democratic reforms being voted down by the Legislative chamber (Legco) in December 2005. Rarely, if ever, the Legco had voted down bluntly a proposal coming from the highest official of Hong Kong.

The opposition to the Hong Kong government and to its autocratic manners had been galvanized by a ruling in April 2004 of the National People's

Congress Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Assembly to rule out universal suffrage in the near future, and in particular for the election of the next CEO and the next legislature. The position of the Hong Kong government was that under the circumstances, its reform package was the best that could be given to the Hong Kong people and a step towards democracy. The public and the pro-democratic legislators saw it as a bad deal. Today the Hong Kong government blames the democratic camp (a loose alliance of pro-democratic legislators) for blocking the democratic development of the Hong Kong system. Both camps are now engaged in a war of communication to get their message across.

Communication as a political tool is generally analysed via its rhetoric and its argumentation and forensic rhetoric refers to situations where judgements of right or wrong have to be made (Korhonen 1992). To understand the rhetoric and logic of the different actors as well as the building-up of the themes that are the bread and butter of the political dialogue in Hong Kong, we used the methodology outlined by Pekka Korhonen's (1952) and Stephen Toulmin (1958).

The Toulmin system asks the observer to isolate three key features of any rhetoric that are what he calls Major Claims (C), Major Data (D) and Warrants (W). Major Claims are the broadest and the most encompassing statements made by the speaker, at a level of abstraction higher than other statements. They represent what the speaker hopes will become the residual message in the listeners' minds. To achieve this purpose, they are frequently repeated in any kind of speech. Major Data means the supporting structure of the discourse, and in particular the answers to the audience's question: What makes you say so? And so on, are examples of major data. Finally, warrants are what Toulmin calls the keys. Those keys make the "movement" from Major Data to Major Claim possible. Those links symbolise the relation between the data and the claim.

In Hong Kong, six strong claims have emerged since 1997. They are

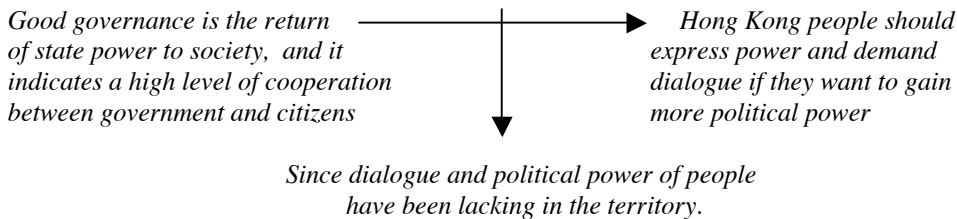
- 1) people power,
- 2) fighting for better life in the name of democracy,
- 3) challenging the authorities,
- 4) stability and prosperity,
- 5) Beijing principles, and
- 6) mutual understanding.

As can be seen, those claims need not to be necessarily coherent as a whole. At first look, stability and prosperity are the opposite of the others as any challenge to the post-colonial government would be detrimental to stability.

Those recurrent themes derive directly from the discussions that took place at all levels of the Hong Kong society after the handover of 1997. They appear to overwhelm the local media, in particular in the years 2003 and 2004 with a myriad of articles on the subject.

PEOPLE POWER

In the Toulmin system, people power is a warrant. It is directly linked to the rhetoric of good governance. The catalyst in Hong Kong was the Article 23 controversy. Article 23 of the Basic Law deals with security issues and the problem of sovereignty. The controversy scared the public and degenerated into an open public discussion about trust and good governance. As good governance is nowadays packaged with democracy, a demand for a faster pace of democratic development ensued. The rhetoric can be structured as follows:



"Return power to the people, respect the people's voice".

Social activists generally used such slogans (2). They suggest that good governance returns when power shifts from the state apparatus to the society. State power and social power are actually antithetical. Usually the former subsists by draining the latter. What state power is will differ according to the state type but it does not change the equation.

In any case, good governance requires a high level of cooperation between state and society, between the government and its citizens. As far as the whole of the society is concerned, there would be no good governance without a government, but equally without citizens' participation. It is increasingly accepted that good governance relies primarily on the voluntary

cooperation of the citizens and their conscientious acceptance of a central authority.

Therefore, one could argue that the basis for good governance is the citizen or the civil society, rather than the government or the state. This implies that without a sound and developed civil society, good governance is impossible. Many scholars argued for example that one of the reasons for the emergence and development of the theory and practice of good governance in China since the 1990s has been the birth of a new civil society. Over time, that civil society is bound to bring about changes in the structure and status of governance (Yu 2000).

As a discourse of the ordinary citizens, 'power to the people' simply conveys the message that the people do not trust the powers-that-be and want to take back into their own hands decisions affecting their wellbeing and destiny. Such a development underlines political maturity in general, and in the case of the Hong Kong community, its desire and readiness for greater democracy. People forgive and forget government's mistakes when they occur from time to time. However, when errors of judgment accumulate over time, people begin to lose faith. That's what has happened in Hong Kong. Here, many opinion polls (3) have shown that public's trust in the government is very low. Distrust in politics is prevalent. More than 60 per cent of respondents have said no political parties could represent the people of Hong Kong.

The official Mainland press suppressed the news of the July 2003 demonstration and the subsequent protests (4.) However, reports on local internet news sites, as well as on the Hong Kong-based Phoenix satellite television service and local Hong Kong television, which is widely received in neighboring Guangdong province, ensured that what happened on July 1 and later on would be widely known on the Mainland. Moreover, the thousands of visitors shuttling daily between Hong Kong and the Mainland mean that it is virtually impossible to quarantine political events on either side of the border.

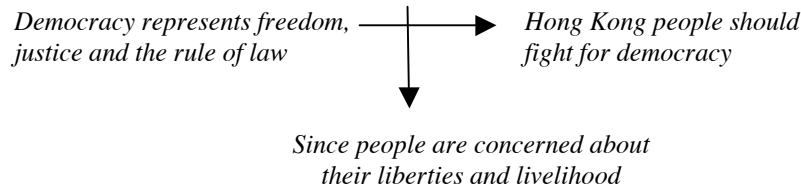
Network society is reality. It offers new means to people power to gain attention and to spread any kind of message, in particular that of democratization. Like Manuel Castells (1997, 106) says, the powerful impact of the movement has come, to a large extent, from their media presence and from the effective use of information technology.

Mass demonstrations are said to be an expression of people's power. But they were the result of more subtle changes already in process, Loh and

Galbraith argued (2003). For example earlier in 2003, during the Sars outbreak, Hong Kong people had a taste of what a difference they could make through community initiatives to help fellow citizens and to change government thinking on many issues relating to prevention and control measures.

Hong Kong people began to realize that they had a responsibility to participate in the affairs of their city. Discussing Sars and other public issues improved their awareness of public affairs and led them to make a concerted effort to influence public policy. Awareness led to the rhetorical act that now it was the turn of the governments of Hong Kong and China to listen and that choices needed to be made. Networking people power does more than just organize activity and share information. It creates new attitudes and the network could be said to be at the same time a producer and a distributor of new cultural codes (Manuel Castells -1997).

FIGHT FOR A BETTER LIFE



*“Improve people’s livelihood”,
 “What we’re after, is a government that is made accountable to its people”*

The above slogans were used during mass demonstrations. Adding up to the notion of people power, they express a determination to defend core values considered necessary to maintain a healthy society. The three core values that are most cherished are the rule of law, freedom of expression, and press freedom. In Hong Kong, because of its colonial origin and current status, demonstrations were a form of dialogue with the Central government (Beijing) as much as with the Hong Kong government.

People in Hong Kong worried about their livelihood. Since 1997, different societal groups have emerged and developed different identities and narratives. The pro-democracy camp remains the most visible group, but diversified fields of civil society include nowadays many other groups one of which being, for example, "the Society for the Protection of the Harbour",

which has established itself as the watchdog of the application of the Harbour Ordinance (5). This ordinance declares that Victoria Harbour is a special public asset and natural heritage of all Hong Kong people and that the Government must stop all reclamations and protect and preserve the harbour front.

There is also the “Civil Human Rights Front” (CHRF), an umbrella organization that regroups more than 40 non-governmental groups (NGO) in Hong Kong, as well as the “Christians for Hong Kong Society”, the “Hong Kong Journalists Association,” many students unions, and other pro-democracy factions. All aim to better the life of the Hong Kong people, and in general, democracy is seen to be the answer to the current problems of the city. Hence the assimilation between a better life and democracy.

“Fight for democracy” and “We want democracy”

We quote here two slogans used by the demonstrators. While fighting and wanting have a little difference in nuance, both messages are a stepping-stone towards political maturity. They express a demand for political reforms and the democratization of the Hong Kong political structure inherited from the British and pretty much still in place.

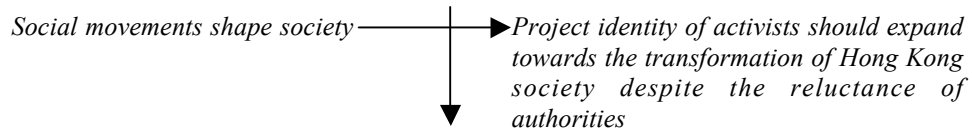
Within the middle class, a significant, yet, small numbers of people have been fighting for democracy on various fronts. And because of the propensity of civil society to reject compromise, or interest-based actions as well as participation in routinized institutions, civil groups are bound to demand a greater and faster pace of democratization (Sing 2004).

What matters is that their struggles through the public sphere establish a new set of normative codes, which helps push for democratic reform. In discursive terms, the public becomes familiar with terms such as openness, public accountability, equality and inclusion in response to secrecy, administrative interest, privilege and exclusion.

But there were also factual grievances behind the protest. Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the poor handling by the government of the Sars outbreak that overwhelmed Hong Kong between March and May 2003. Many others felt they had to march to express their concerns because their views were not adequately represented by anyone, including Hong Kong’s political parties. For these people, the protest march was a “self-help” event in the absence of other means to show their general dissatisfaction. And the march

opened up a new discursive space for political claims that so far had not been seen so prevalent in Hong Kong.

CHALLENGING AUTHORITIES



Since acting civil society is capable of challenging state power

People in Hong Kong have questioned the legitimacy of the Chinese leaders to rule from Beijing. It is a text book argument. Gramsci (1971) pointed out that a rift between popular masses and ruling ideologies could not be cured by the simple exercise of force. And force cannot prevent new ideologies from imposing themselves. If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer leading but only dominant, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies. They no longer believe what they used to believe previously (Ibid.).

In the case of Hong Kong, the colonial consensus was broken not by the 1997 handover, but by repeated economical problems and government blunders combined with a fear of loosing freedoms. People's faith in Hong Kong success and prosperity was diminished to the point where they started to challenge the leadership. The mishandling of the chicken flu saga and then Sars broke the dominant narrative of "administrative success". In theoretical terms, it can be said that the moral authority of the paternalistic government that Hong Kong had for so many years was weakened to the point that a new narrative became necessary.

"We dare to say no to the ruler"

"The ruler cannot take away our rights, we want our rights back"

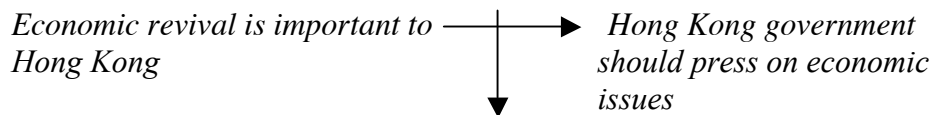
"The government performance is not satisfactory and the people near the president in China are disturbing democracy in Hong Kong"

Just as a person's or an organization's credibility with the public is established through narrative construction and heroic characterization, it could be lost through narrative deconstruction and de-heroization in times of conflict and crisis (Ku 2001). In times of uncertainty and challenge in Hong Kong, people power via the slogan "fighting for better life" is in fact a challenge to the

authorities that has undermined the credibility of the traditional narrative of stability and prosperity that so far was sustaining a particular political or social order.

Castells talks about the crisis of institutions of the state and of the civil society (1996). While the crisis of state in the globalisation age might be true for Hong Kong, the crisis of civil society along the state, because of the unfinished structure of the civil society in Hong Kong and in Asia, is a more complex issue. The traditional Habermasian (6) civil society might not even be able to emerge, when states are already in conflict with the global networking power. As Gramsci put it (Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 1971), challenging authorities means challenging the hegemonic discourse. And as a matter of fact, such a discourse has continually to assert its dominance by incorporating, displacing or dissolving other competing discourses within its own articulation.

STABILITY AND PROSPERITY



Since stability and prosperity are the traditional keys to the success of Hong Kong

In a society, the hegemonic discourse that serves to reproduce a set of power relationships usually builds upon specific narratives of glory, success or development, which may incorporate or displace the democratic codes (Ku 2001).

In Hong Kong, the narrative of glory has been about the extraordinary strong alliance between government and capital that, according to the narrative, underpinned political stability and economical success for many years. In Hong Kong politics, concern for political and social stability was used and overstated to strengthen and confirm the legitimacy of the government's authority. Hong Kong had to persuade international companies and international capital that it had the stability to ensure the safety of their investment and their staff.

Equally, a successful economy was a key factor in ensuring political stability and legitimacy towards the people. The feel-good factor generated by economic growth induces and always increases satisfaction with a government. That is why Tung Chee-hwa pressed on economic development to marshal

people's interests away from societal stir. "*The most pressing issue we face is to revive the economy as soon as possible*", Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa said (speeches 2003-2004)" (7). Other recurring narratives were "*Stability is the cornerstone of our success in the past*" and "*Division is damaging Hong Kong*".

The strength of the rhetoric of stability and prosperity is also found in Tung's Policy Addresses for both the year 2003 and the year 2004. In his speeches, words related to the economy (economical development, recovery, difficulties, cooperation...) are used more than 170 times. In comparison, words about democracy, civil society or activism are not mentioned at all. Hong Kong people and mass demonstrations are mentioned twice, while stability, relationship and cooperation with the Mainland are cited almost a hundred times.

Behind the hegemonic communal claims of prosperity and stability was actually a strong inclination to keep the colonial system of elite privilege and executive domination as a bulwark against an increasingly assertive public.

At first, the demonstration by 500,000 people of July 1, 2003 and the several rallies thereafter seemed to convince the leadership in Beijing that more should be done to relaunch the economic prosperity of Hong Kong, so that stability would be maintained. What stability actually meant in this narrative, is a simple chain of thoughts: Stability = no mass riots = administrative effectiveness.

There is of course, everywhere, a symbiotic relationship between economic growth and political stability. Still stability is more than just economic prosperity. Like Castells (1990) says, the stability in Hong Kong has not been purely the result of the acquiescence of its population nor the outcome of the government quelling social protests. It appeared to derive from the combined effects of social reform, improved living conditions, some kind of political liberalization with the opening up of new channels for citizen participation.

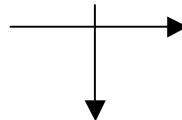
But the fact is that the Hong Kong system is very interventionist (and not *laissez-faire* at all), and its modes of intervention pertain more to the sphere of collective consumption and public infrastructure than to the realm of production or capital circulation. For example, housing in Hong Kong has always been one of the main instruments of the government to intervene in the economy and the society. We have here a striking paradox, with the two leading urban economies, Singapore and Hong Kong, listed as the champions of liberal

economies, while one and the other have the largest public housing program (in percentage of population) in the capitalist world.

During the political transition of 1984-1997, despite the demands by the pro-democracy activists, the colonial government, the British and the local socio-economic elite formed an undeclared strategic power alliance with the Chinese government to obstruct democratic development. In their hegemonic articulation, democracy was undermined by the construction of a narrative of a miraculous economic success without political instability. This narrative did have a material basis in a fast-developing economy and a relatively stable political order in the last three decades or so. But it might have been coincidental. In any case, when economic success subsided, instability set in as the governmental hegemony became apparent for what it was: an hegemonic power. Strength of this hegemony is now built on what we called the Beijing principles.

BELJING PRINCIPLES

*Hong Kong is a
Special Administrative Region
of China*



*Hong Kong cannot
change its political structure
on its own*

*Since Hong Kong administration is based on the ruling
principles formed in Beijing*

In an undemocratic or partially democratic society, a hegemonic articulation by the dominant groups submerges or undermines democracy not so much by direct opposition as by a narrative displacement. A narrative is a powerful symbolic medium through which events are selected and interpreted as meaningful and through which identities are constituted and reconstructed (Hart 2001). Narrative displacement means that certain value codes are made out of place, irrelevant or peripheral in a narrative construction centred on a different set of codes (Ibid.). Democracy development is for example included in the Basic Law. The question is: do the Beijing principles impede this development?

In day-to-day politics, the Central Government has expressed serious concerns about the constitutional review relating to the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Those concerns were raised through different channels and they expressed a number of principles. In general, such principles have their roots in Deng Xiaoping's remarks in 1984.

In February 20, 2004, Tung in a media session summarized them as follows, talking about "One Country, Two Systems": *"specifically, the Central Government has pointed out that "One Country" is the premise on which "Two Systems" is implemented. "One Country" refers specifically to the People's Republic of China."*

The narrative suggests hegemony of the "One Country" over "Two Systems". In its most reduced sense, it states that the Beijing leadership may not need to change its view - no matter how many protest against it.

About people running Hong Kong, Tung Chee-Hwa had this to say: *"Hong Kong people running Hong Kong: patriots must form the main body that runs Hong Kong. There are specific criteria for a patriot. A patriot respects one's own nation, sincerely supports "One Country, Two Systems" and does not do anything that would harm our country or Hong Kong".* And about a high degree of autonomy: *"Hong Kong's autonomy is exercised under authorisation by the Central Government".*

So patriots must form the main group of people ruling Hong Kong. But what does patriotic mean, exactly? One Beijing official is said to have questioned whether those who opposed the Article 23 legislation were patriotic under the one country principle. The pro-Beijing camp joined the chorus by accusing the members of the Democratic Party of being unpatriotic. If those who did not support the national security legislation are unpatriotic, by the same token, those who took part in the historic July 1 march and those who clamoured for direct elections of the chief executive would apparently fare no better. But since then, this line of argument seems to have subsided.

On executive-led government, Tung said the following: *"this is an important principle under the design of the Basic Law. Constitutional development in Hong Kong must not deviate from this principle."*

In fact, no one in Hong Kong had been contradicting this principle. However, question marks were raised because of the ambiguous nature of the wordings and the pace of open ended developments. Those arguments were centered on the personality of the Chief Executive and the means to choosing one. Tung actually had failed badly in the politics played out by the space provided by the media. His public image was unsatisfactory. Nowadays, leadership is personalized, and image making is power making. People like Tung Chee-hwa are facing scrutiny and they have to cope with it. As he

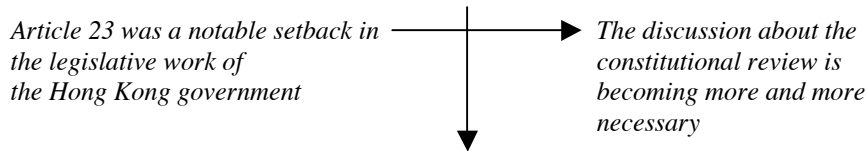
dismissed the media play as irrelevant, his failure led people to question what should be a Chief Executive Officer. The Basic Law had no answer.

As for the rhetoric about a balanced participation, the Chief Executive Officer of the region laid down the following rules: “*our political structure must have due regard to the interests of all sectors of society. Also, constitutional development must accord with the principles of gradual and orderly progress and fully reflect the actual situation in Hong Kong*”.

Some of the principles on which Beijing seeks reassurance are never been questioned, while others remain perennial bones of contention with no definite answers. Tung Che Hwa referred to them with a narrative such as *in light of the actual situation, and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress*. They normally need not be discussed indefinitely, nor should they get in the way of the constitutional review. Unfortunately, the reform issue rocketed on the list of Hong Kong people's priorities because many people thought that both governments had failed to respond positively to the community's single most united demand – the opening up of the system of government and devolution of some power to the people.

People in Hong Kong know that constitutional reform has never been the exclusive preserve of Hong Kong SAR and is not going to be in the future. Actually the important issue here is not at all the interpretation of the Basic Law but a deep gap between the Hong Kong people who aspire for democracy, and the Beijing leaders who have deep-rooted fears about Hong Kong using democracy to oppose the Mainland. Polarization of views always leads to increasing instability. Conversely, instability fuels polarization; a certain vicious circle could be in the offing if nothing is done.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING



Since despite the growing pressures from civil society, government is unwilling to open up any politics

“The SAR’s residents already enjoy real and unprecedented democracy.”
“The SAR’s political system should be changed only gradually and according to the limits laid out in Beijing.”

During the Article 23 debate, the rhetoric of the Hong Kong leadership failed to convince people that new choices had to be made, and leaders were seen as exploiters rather than helpers. On the other hand, the democratic activists have failed so far to convince the leadership of the virtue of democracy.

Admittedly, at the beginning, if the half-baked rhetoric in the democracy camp unburdened people’s worries and thoughts, its constant narrow-minded accusations failed to weaken the leadership’s control over the premises of the discussion. Thus for a while no consensus emerged.

“Let us work together to build a prosperous, stable, free, democratic, harmonious, and united Hong Kong.”

“What we need in our community is peace, stability, and mutual understanding.”

Above statements from Tung Chee-hwa’s speeches are beautiful words of cooperation and understanding. To the people who took part in the rallies, Tung said repeatedly that he understood, and the government understood. In his Policy Address for year 2004 he repeated this view outlining: *“Government departments will strengthen their understanding of public views and attitudes through contacts in various sectors. My colleagues and I will keep in touch with people through different channels and means to achieve a clearer understanding of their aspirations.”*

Then, the pro-democracy activists and other civil society actors changed tack by opening channel directly to Beijing: *“We hope that Beijing views the demonstrations as an expression of the public’s desire for democracy, not as a protest against the Central Government.”* Then, for the first time they addressed the main concern by stating: *“Asking for democracy is not to seek independence.”*

By clarifying their views, they narrowed down Beijing’s concerns while cleaning up their negative and threatening image in the eyes of Chinese authorities. Failing to convince the Hong Kong leadership, they then had to convince the Chinese leadership that democracy would not endanger the Chinese rule over Hong Kong. Repeatedly, the democratic activists pointed out

that Hong Kong people were Chinese and proud to be Chinese. Notwithstanding, if positive views on a common identity with common ethnical and cultural roots are found in studies (8) and are a bridge for mutual understanding, in practice, beautiful speeches on a common '*magnificent history*' are unlikely to be enough for maintaining common thoughts about future relations.

The problem of trust influences heavily on both sides. Democrats have hoped to start a dialogue and to give the Chinese leadership a more comprehensive picture of Hong Kong's situation, while the Hong Kong administration has given some promises on preparedness to dialogue. However, so far little has happened.

Opinions about the reasons for the missing dialogue vary a lot. The democrats say that Tung Chee-hwa listened only to its supporters and the DAB, who seemed to have the trust of Beijing. On the other hand, in the so-called "pro-China" camp, the aggressiveness of the democrats is often seen as a major barrier for starting the dialogue.

The 2004/2005 outburst was in fact triggered by a strong collective resistance to a perceived loss of freedom. Whether it was warranted or not does not matter. What remains is that such a perception led to the formation of a sustainable collective voice claiming for better governance in Hong Kong. This view paved the way for a demand for political reform in a system that has not changed for the past fifty years. It also symbolised the search for a pro-active Hong Kong identity within its new national context. Hence a change in the narrative is now in the process from negative and disruptive criticism or stunning silence to more positive and constructive argumentation. Yet, fragmentation in the civil society and resistance in the administration remain the main stumbling blocks to substantial reforms.

What pro-democracy forces need is to enhance their bargaining power to the point where it becomes a real threat to the government's interests. Meanwhile, the more the civil society and political society marshal support from the grassroots, the middle class, the business community, the more they have to assure China of the harmless nature of Hong Kong's claim for democracy.

Using the Toulminian lexicon, it can be said that the major claim is that Hong Kong should be democratised. People want it and they consider that their wellbeing depends on it (major data). Yet, anti-democratic groups (in the

business community there are plenty because of the cartel-like nature of the Hong Kong economy) have also been keen to mobilise domestic forces and the general public against democratization. The response from the domestic pro-democracy forces has been to press the government by mass demonstrations, but not all were successful.

Notwithstanding, history shows that a seemingly much weaker force (such as the pro-democracy camp in Hong Kong) can successfully obtain concessions from a stronger one (such as the combined force of an authoritarian government and the capital), as long as the former can pose an effective threat to the interests of the latter.

History books are full of political systems that have been shaken and political leaders that have been removed. And in Asia, all the more so since the financial crisis of 1997 (Castells, 1997, 333). All those fallen leaders were in very entrenched positions when attacked, yet they could not sustain a systematic offensive against their interests. In Hong Kong the issue is not about destroying anything or removing anyone because the government is primarily run by civil servants and not political figures, but about fitting new political expressions into traditional political categories.

CONCLUSION

We have here outlined a partial vision of the current political dialogue in Hong Kong: the democratic movement is currently the most visible part of the civil society, while both the Hong Kong and the Chinese leaderships are holding the main roles. We have left aside in this review the business community and its tycoons, and other members of civil society such as church affiliated groups or even the civil service. It does not mean that they have faded in the background, but that the onus for change is now on a broader pace and that it overwhelmed other concerns and other specific interests.

People power, fight for better life, challenging authorities, prosperity and stability, Beijing principles, and mutual understanding, are the lingo used by the political actors and their opponents. They define the struggle for change.

At the end, one reckons that it is all about hegemony and the role of the Chinese authorities over Hong Kong. The British colonial consensus has been broken and a new structure has to be found. That is why the dominant elite of Hong Kong that inherited its position and authority from the colonial power is still actively seeking *popular consent* to its leadership by drawing on the

formerly successful and familiar themes, using the old symbols prevailing in a colonial society. Opposing them are the civil society and various groups emerging out of the shadow of the colonial one. They challenge the status quo situation and present a set of different values, themes or symbols or they reinterpret the dominant ones to their advantage.

The hegemonic narrative of stability and prosperity associated with the government-business alliance as its backbone is well known. Less well known are in Hong Kong and in the Hong Kong collective psyche the other narratives. In particular challenging the authorities and to fight authorities for a better life, can be said to be new ideas in this town. This is why the politics of domination and resistance in Hong Kong may reach a turning point in the near future.

We have said that the "Fight for better life" theme is always linked to a claim for a better democracy. But it is more than that. Manuel Castell argues that it involves the notion of wellbeing and happiness and leads to the development of grass-rooted networks of communal resistance. Communal resistance in Hong Kong is a novelty in itself. It means Hong Kong feels as a community. It never had in the past.

Furthermore, such theme, when connected to "the people power" theme, clearly suggests the possibility of "governance failure". Again it was unheard of. In the colonial system, there was no notion of the possibility of "governance failure".

The "stability" theme must be looked at in the context of the history of Hong Kong and its neighbours (including China). It is not surprising that in the past the Hong Kong people rated stability very high, being for most of them refugees from various wars and political upheavals. But the rejuvenation of the population, most of the Hong Kong people today has no first-hand experience of war and political upheavals, is weakening every day the strength of the theme. And stability runs contrary to many other themes, such as progress for example. The Hong Kong people feel probably secured enough not to be worried anymore by instability to prevent them from rallying as they did on July 1 2003.

The strong turnout on July 1, 2003 rally was evidence of a political system that failed to properly incorporate the views of the community in the policy-making process, and of an inept leadership. And it was seen as such by the Chinese leadership that took then the decision to remove Tung Chee hwa at a later date.

Yet, such signs of social instabilities are not all negative. They do have positive features. Hong Kong people outlined there that they had few channels of communication open to them. So they used the demonstrations to get their message across. Many marchers were not there to fight the Article 23, but to denounce a system that did not give them a chance to express their views in general. China responded by opening new channels, albeit at her own pace.

Social movements are neither good nor bad; they are actually the avenues of our transformation. Yet "*transformation may equally lead to a whole range of heavens, hells, or heavenly hells*" (Castells, 1997). This is not an incidental remark, since processes of social change in our world often take forms of fanaticism and violence that we don't usually associate with positive social change.

However, in the case of Hong Kong, the social demands are not fundamental or violent, but this does not disqualify them from being a true social movement, and therefore, it is a symptom of its society.

The prospects for political development in Hong Kong hinge on several factors: a government's initiative to undertake constitutional reforms, the China factor, the distribution of political power among the major political parties, and the political inclinations of the citizens. The massive protests during the years 2003, 2004 and 2005 and the turnout in the District Council elections in November 2003 are an unmistakable sign that the clamor for democratization has surged on the top of the list of priorities for many.

But what kind of democratization? Some such as Kuan and Lau (1995) argue that, in reality, the public's conception of democracy is full of intricate ambiguities. The prime motivation seems to be that it would lead to an improvement in the livelihood of the people.

Hong Kong is now in the situation that Gramsci (1971) describes as the old dying while the new cannot be born; in this situation might appear a variety of morbid symptoms. It is a situation caused by the 'crisis of authority' of the old generations in power, which we witnessed nowadays in Hong Kong, and the 'problem of the younger generation', which occurs in the immaturity of the democracy movement.

If the political leadership in both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments remains conservative in its approach and does not introduce

democratic initiatives in Hong Kong, the political development in the SAR will surely stagnate. Yet it runs contrary to the political inclination of the general public. Could the pace of democratization be stopped? It is hard to believe it could but some might be tempted to slow it down.

According to various surveys and studies conducted over the last two decades, it has been observed that people in Hong Kong have begun to accept the generally defined concepts of democracy, accountability, direct elections, responsible government, responsive administration, liberty, and political freedom (Lam, 2002). In 1995 Kuan and Lau (9) wrote that the democratic aspirations of the people of Hong Kong could be characterized as a partial vision of democracy that is largely congruent with the partial character of the reform measures so far implemented by the authorities.

Lately the regressive political reform package of Donald Tsang was unequivocally junked down as it was perceived as yet another example of partial reform measures. It shows that the strategy of partial and half-baked reform whose main purpose is to slow down the process is no longer working. The paradigm has changed. The premise that public policies should in the end serve the interests of the people but that the governmental structure and processes need not depend on their expressed preferences seems not to be acceptable. It seems to have been replaced by the new concept that politicians should be judged in terms of their ability to defend people's interests whether they are directly or indirectly elected. Accountability among the administration and universal suffrage become centre-stage, while partial vision and partial commitment are more and more jettisoned. Notwithstanding, there is still a long way to go toward a fully fledged political system.

Kaisa Oksanen' s endnotes

- 1 South China Morning Post. January 3, 2004. <http://www.scmp.com>
- 2 Slogans released for example on the Civil Human Rights Front's web page. August 5, 2004. http://www.civilhrfront.org/index_e.htm
- 3 South China Morning Post e.g. October 15, 2003. <http://www.scmp.com>
- 4 Far Eastern Economic Review. July 24, 2003.
- 5 <<http://www.friendsoftheharbour.org>>, February 6, 2004.
- 6 Jürgen Habermas, "Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Herman Luchterhand Verlag, Darmstadt und Neuwied, 1962.
- 7 Tung Chee-hwa's Speeches and Statements 2003-2004. <http://www.info.gov.hk/ce/speech/cesp.htm>
- 8 For example Timothy Ka-ying Wong, "Identity in the 2000 Legislative Elections." In Kuan, Hsin-chi; Lau, Siu-Kai and Wong, Timothy Ka-ying (eds.): *Out of the Shadow of 1997? The Chinese University of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, 2002, p. 161-185.
- 9 Hsin-chi Kuan and Siu-Kai Lau, "The Partial Vision of Democracy in Hong Kong: A Survey of Popular Opinion." *The China Journal*, 34, 1995, p. 239-264.

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