The Emergence of Radical Politics in Hong Kong: Causes and Impact

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Abstract

This article reviews the literature on the radicalization of politics in Hong Kong, with an emphasis on its causes and impact. Evidence on the deteriorating living standards and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor has been substantial. People naturally blame the government under such circumstances. They have been especially angry with government policies favoring the business community, and the "greed" and corruption of the Donald Tsang and C. Y. Leung administrations. The consensus on the origins, characteristics, modes of operation, and so on of the new social movements is strong; and the same applies to the failure of the government to anticipate and absorb their challenges. Confidence in the maintenance of social stability remains high, but there is little optimism that the performance of the government will soon improve.

In the first year of the C. Y. Leung administration, Hong Kong people in general are very frustrated with the unsatisfactory performance of the

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government and the deterioration in the political culture. Political polarization has been exacerbated, and reaching a consensus on policies has become increasingly challenging. Social schisms have been deepening, diluting the pragmatism and moderation that were significant characteristics of the territory’s political culture. In this context, the emergence of radical politics in Hong Kong and the frustrations of the “post-80s generation” have attracted much attention. There is an awareness that radical politics is a symptom rather than the cause of Hong Kong’s political problems. As long as the establishment remains united, it still enjoys the control of the policy-making processes.

This article examines the literature on the deteriorating living standards and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor in the territory that are perceived as the root causes of the community’s grievances and dissatisfaction and as the factors which have contributed to the rise of radical politics. It then considers the responsibilities of the HKSAR government in terms of both its political philosophy and its performance. In this context, the author studies the emergence of new social movements, their characteristics, modes of operation, and so on. An assessment of their impact on effective governance follows. The limitations of depending mainly on secondary data and the existing publications of academics are obvious. A satisfactory explanation for the variety of political radicalism would require information and original research on the formation, objectives, organization, modes of mobilization, leadership, and strategies of different radical groups.

1. The Deteriorating Living Standards and the Widening of the Gap between the Rich and the Poor

Political stability in China may perhaps be explained in this simple way: people do not see a credible alternative to the Communist Party regime; more important still, a vast majority of the Chinese population has experienced substantial improvement in living standards in the past three and a half decades, and most of them still expect further improvement in the years to come. In contrast, most people in Hong Kong believe that their real incomes have fallen since the territory’s return to China in 1997; and a majority of the population is pessimistic about its future. Young people have acutely felt a decline in their opportunities for upward social mobility. These factors are generally regarded as the root causes of the community’s dissatisfaction and the emergence of radical politics.
As Leo Goodstadt observes, “For the first time in decades, poverty became widespread.”¹ The HKSAR government admitted, the number of workers who, “despite working hard,” “consistently cannot earn reasonable salaries to satisfy the basic needs of themselves and their families” was to reach almost 200,000.² By 2005, the government reluctantly conceded that more than a million people (15 percent of the population) were living in poverty.³ A government-sponsored study stated that the “post-80s generation” was the best educated in Hong Kong history, yet they encountered worse employment opportunities, lower earnings, and less hopeful lifetime prospects than their parents’ generation.⁴ Even when the economy improved, the community did not consider that they had benefitted. When Donald Tsang, C. H. Tung’s successor, visited Beijing for an official visit in December 2006, he told central government officials that “Hong Kong’s economy is the best it has been in almost twenty years.”⁵ The message was clear: the economy was in good shape, there should be no severe political challenges, and the Chinese leadership should be satisfied with his administration.

At the end of September 2013, the C. Y. Leung administration released its definition of the local poverty line, that is, families with incomes equal to or less than half of the median income of families in Hong Kong with the same number of members. In concrete dollar terms, this definition refers to one-person families with monthly incomes of HK$3,600 or less in 2012, two-person families with monthly incomes of HK$7,700 or less, three-person families with monthly incomes of HK$11,500 or less, four-person families with monthly incomes of HK$14,300 or less, five-person families with monthly incomes of HK$14,800 or less, and families of six persons or more with monthly incomes of HK$15,800 or less. According to these criteria, people in poverty amounted to 1.31 million, 19.6 percent of the population. With the intervention of social security and various benefits, people in poverty still reached 1.02 million. The government promised to help the “working-poor” families, but it has been criticized for the absence of policy objectives and policy programs meant to reduce poverty.⁶ A study by the Bauhinia Foundation, a think tank close to Donald Tsang, revealed that the median household income in 2005 was still 15.8 percent lower than in the peak year of 1997. More serious still, between 1996 and 2005, the number of households with a monthly income below HK$8,000 rose by 76.5 percent, to more than 500,000, and their proportion of the total number of households rose from 13 percent to 22 percent.⁷
Obviously the chief executive felt pressure to respond. Speaking in a question-and-answer session at the Legislative Council in January 2007, Donald Tsang admitted that some low-income households had failed to benefit from the stronger economy, but the most important thing was to create jobs through a stronger economy. He indicated that at least wage levels had stopped declining; in the last quarter of 2005, those earning HK$15,000 or more per month accounted for more than one-third of the labor force, compared with a quarter during the same period a decade ago. Furthermore, the proportion of workers earning less than HK$9,000 per month also dropped from 42 percent in 1996 to 36 percent in 2005, while the lowest income group, earning less than HK$5,000 per month, represented only 5 percent of the working population. The chief executive also pointed to the falling unemployment rate, which stood at 4.4 percent at the end of 2005. But obviously he had not taken into consideration inflation and the rise of housing prices.

Kenichi Ohmae’s book *The Impact of Rising Lower-Middle Class Population in Japan: What Can We Do about It?*, was a best seller in Japan and generated much discussion in Taiwan as well. Dr. Ohmae considers that a vast majority of Japanese will fall into the lower-middle-class socioeconomic group because globalization will lead to a further widening of the gap between the rich and the poor and exacerbate social polarization. Perhaps Hong Kong’s new university graduates can most easily associate with Dr. Ohmae’s arguments. A sociology professor at a local university told the author this true story in 2004, when Hong Kong’s economy had hit rock bottom. He was talking to some new graduates, and when he addressed them as the young middle class, one student said he did not feel like they belonged to the middle class. The economy today is, of course, better. But the median monthly salary of new graduates is between HK$11,000 and HK$12,000; many also owe the government HK$200,000 or so in student loans. Unless they can depend on their parents for food and housing, they will hardly be able to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Neither can they expect steady promotions and salary increases.

The postwar generation in Hong Kong enjoyed satisfactory salary increases on the basis of hard work. Dr. Ohmae argues that this cannot be expected in today’s Japan, where employees’ salaries will probably peak when they hit forty. Further raises will be difficult, and Hong Kong’s situation is probably similar. Dr. Ohmae suggests the Japanese should adjust their lifestyles, since not everyone will join the middle
class. They may have to forget about owning cars and houses in the suburbs and paying expensive tuition fees to prepare their children for top universities.

Furthermore, in an aging society with a sharply falling fertility rate, the financial burden of social services will increase. Taxation will rise in the absence of administrative reforms. At this stage, Hong Kong’s Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) is inadequate to provide for the community’s retirement, and Hong Kong people have yet to tackle the long-term financing of their medical services. Employees today would have to wait another 20 years at least before their MPF accounts were large enough to contribute in an important way to their retirement incomes. Since their birth, MPF accounts have been managed by private-sector financial institutions whose fees were considered excessive and returns rather disappointing. Most people do not consider their MPF accounts a significant part of their savings for retirement.

Meanwhile, the gap between the rich and the poor poor has been widening. In 2001, the Gini coefficient in Hong Kong already reached 0.525; it is expected to be even higher. Normally, a level exceeding 0.4 provokes caution, and the territory’s level is comparable to that in some Latin American countries. According to a document prepared by the local legislature, the Gini coefficients were 0.249 in Japan in 1993, 0.326 in Taiwan in 2000, 0.316 in South Korea in 1998, and 0.425 in Singapore in 1998. In September 2010, Oxfam in Hong Kong published its report on poverty in the territory, which indicated that the incomes of the poorest one-fifth of families had shown no improvement in the past five and a half years and the median monthly incomes of the poorest one-tenth and one-fifth of families were HK$3,000 and HK$6,000, respectively. In comparison, the median monthly income of the richest one-tenth of families had risen by 16 percent to HK$80,900, about 27 times that of the poorest one-tenth of families, reflecting that the gap between the rich and the poor had been widening since 2004.

In October 2010, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service released a research report revealing that the median monthly income of the high-income household group had risen from HK$31,000 in the previous year to HK$32,950, while that of the low-income household group had basically remained unchanged at HK$9,000. The income gap between the two groups had been maintained at the ratio of 3.4:1 in the past four years, but in the first half of 2010 it rose to 3.7:1. Apparently, the income gap worsened in the economic recovery after the global financial
tsunami in 2008–2009.\textsuperscript{13} According to the Census and Statistics Department of the HKSAR government, in the quarter from September to November 2009, the number of households with a monthly income of HK$25,000 and above dropped from the corresponding period of the previous year; while the number of households in various groups with a monthly income of below HK$10,000 rose, with growth rates ranging from 2.4 percent to 9.7 percent.\textsuperscript{14}

Earlier in August 2009, the Life Quality Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong released a set of statistical and survey data that demonstrated that the overall quality of life of Hong Kong people in the previous year had deteriorated to approximately the level of 2003, when the territory suffered severely from the SARS epidemic. The community’s evaluation of the economy and its ability to purchase accommodation through mortgage had dropped most sharply, falling by 30 percent and 33 percent, respectively; the index on satisfaction with the government’s performance also dropped by 29 percent.\textsuperscript{15}

In the past, the gap between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong was substantial. In the beginning of the 1970s, the governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, made an important commitment to the public housing and education sectors, offering significant improvements in the quality of life at the grassroots level. But neither the British administration nor the community was attracted to the “welfare society” model. Most important of all, before the Asia-Pacific financial crisis in 1997–1998, Hong Kong people considered the territory a place full of opportunities, where individuals’ efforts would be rewarded. Even those who lacked the educational qualifications and prospects for upward social mobility would still pin their hopes on their second generation, who hopefully would become professionals and business executives through tertiary education. The alleviation of intergenerational poverty has become a social issue only in the recent decade.

In view of the globalization process, Hong Kong understands that it has to become a knowledge economy. Hence the competitiveness of the low-education, low-skill labor force has been in sharp decline, and the income gap within the labor force has been widening. In the economic integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the former’s labor-intensive industries moved to the Pearl River Delta in the early 1980s, and the labor-intensive services followed. Meanwhile, the inflow of immigrants from the Mainland expanded the supply of unskilled laborers with a low level of education, contributing to the phenomena of an
increased population of “working-poor” families, the lack of improvement in incomes during the recent economic recovery, and so on.

In September 2010, a survey revealed that among the fourth-generation Hong Kong people (born between 1976 and 1990) interviewed, 20 percent had experienced downward social mobility in the past five years, that is, moving down the occupational ladder. This downward movement was more conspicuous among the stratum of low-skilled and unskilled workers, which constituted 44 percent of the group of affected interviewees. Over half of the respondents admitted that they had no opportunities for upward social mobility because of their low educational qualifications. According to this survey, 51.9 percent of the fourth-generation Hong Kong people (assuming those who arrived in Hong Kong in 1949 or before were the first generation) interviewed believed that they had failed to secure upward social mobility opportunities because of their “low educational qualifications”; 38.9 percent of the respondents blamed the Hong Kong economy; and 33.3 percent considered the fact that they had not worked hard enough and that faulty government policies were the root causes, respectively.16

It is relatively easy to understand that those with “low educational qualifications” lack upward social mobility opportunities; what about those with high educational qualifications? In recent years, there has been much media discussion on the frustration and anger of the “post-80s generation,” including university graduates who were regarded as social elite. Naturally, the supply of university graduates has been increasing, and they have to adjust their expectations to avoid the scenario of “the higher the expectation, the bigger the disappointment.”

Hong Kong’s international competitiveness has been in decline, triggered by the Asia-Pacific financial crisis in 1997–1998. Arguably the weakening of the Hong Kong economy began much earlier. Real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Hong Kong fell from an annual average of 5.2 percent in the 1980s to 3.5 percent from 1990 to 1996, and per worker GDP annual growth fell from 4.7 percent to 3.3 percent.17 Furthermore, a group of economists at The Chinese University of Hong Kong observed that the total factor productivity in the manufacturing sector had declined from 1984 to 1993; this study shows that “the manufacturing sector could produce in 1993 only 87% of the output in 1984.”18 Access to cheap labor in the Pearl River Delta and the huge profits it generated weakened the local manufacturing sector’s incentive to invest to raise its technological level, in contrast to the other three
little dragons of Asia. The “economic bubble” in the run-up to 1997 generated by dramatic rises in prices in the real estate market and stock market also made the economic adjustment process much more painful.

The values of Hong Kong people have been changing gradually. Before 1997, unemployment was not a concern. The community believed that anyone who was willing to work should have no difficulty finding a job. In recent years, it had to accept that the territory’s unemployment rate at one point was higher than those in the United States and the United Kingdom. Hence even those who are gainfully employed worry about the employment of their next generation.

The HKSAR government, think-tanks like the Bauhinia Foundation, and nongovernmental organizations such as Oxfam and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service have produced a substantial body of statistical data demonstrating the deteriorating living standards and the widening gap between the rich and the poor in the territory. But the collection of such data has not been guided by any theoretical framework, and such data have not yet been systematically analyzed by academics. Hence the causal linkage between the deterioration in living standards and the widening income gap on one hand, and the emergence of radical politics in Hong Kong on the other has not been meaningfully established. Furthermore, the above phenomena are not unique to Hong Kong; they are quite common among the other three “little dragons of Asia,” countries at a similar level of development as Hong Kong, and even among developed countries. There is a rich body of literature on the subject, but detailed and systematic comparisons between Hong Kong and other relevant countries are very few in number. The territory has not yet been able to benefit from comparative studies.

2. The Responsibility of the HKSAR Government

Naturally, the HKSAR government has to assume responsibility for the deteriorations in living standards and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. The first chief executive, C. H. Tung, was widely believed to have been forced to step down for health reasons by Beijing in mid-2005 because of his unsatisfactory performance. In the final year of the Donald Tsang administration, according to the opinion survey series conducted by The University of Hong Kong, his popularity ratings fell sharply. In the very first year of the C. Y. Leung administration, it already faced difficulty partly because of various scandals surrounding
the chief executive and his team and partly because of the accumulating grievances in the community.

Goodstadt places the blame on the leadership and values of C. H. Tung. Tung emphasized financial stringency; as a result, austerity budgets, reductions of the civil service establishment, and salaries tended to exacerbate deflation when the economy went into recession; cutbacks on social security and social services too naturally affected their quality and supply. According to Goodstadt, Tung and the top civil servants believed that the “business model” should be followed, that is, to reduce expenditure, avoid debts, and generate budget surpluses. Since the late 1980s, the British administration and its successor had also been attracted by the “new public management” philosophy that enjoyed the support of the international community. The philosophy basically calls for a smaller public sector. Budgetary savings secured through reducing the government bureaucracy were perceived as improvements in efficiency. Social services were adversely affected because health, education, and social welfare are all highly labor-intensive. The complacency on the part of the British administration and the business and professional elite supporting it are to blame as well. Goodstadt observes that the crisis faced by the C. H. Tung administration was exacerbated by the colonial administration’s past inaction; and this delay in investment in social development was deliberate.

This reluctance to invest in social services and welfare was influenced by the government’s own philosophy, but was also reinforced by the Chinese leadership’s Hong Kong policy. During the Sino-British negotiations on the territory’s future and in the transition toward 1997, the Chinese authorities were eager to demonstrate their respect for investors’ interests, and reduce the concern that “Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong” would lead to an increase in expenditure on social services and welfare and therefore rises in taxation. The Chinese authorities were acutely aware that money could depart Hong Kong easily, and investors were uneasy about its future. In addition, Chinese leaders’ suspicions against the British administration included a conspiracy theory that it would spend generously to please the local people, secure popularity and leave the financial problems to its successor, the HKSAR government. This conspiracy theory gained greater currency in view of the deteriorations in Sino-British relations during the Chris Patten administration in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident in June 1989. The strenuous negotiations on the financing of the new airport and the reve-
nues gained from land sales were vivid illustrations of such suspicions.

Under such circumstances, both the British administration and the business and professional elite were reluctant to improve Hong Kong’s social services and welfare. The prodemocracy camp as well as the trade unions and grassroots NGOs were also deterred from demanding for significant improvement in social services. This deterrence effect remained in force throughout the transition period and well into the early years of the HKSAR government.24

The first chief executive, C. H. Tung, declared that Hong Kong had lived in “a bubble economy” for many years.25 In his meetings with the community leaders before his assumption of office, he clearly indicated that he was very concerned with the decline in the territory’s international competitiveness due to its high cost structure, especially the exorbitantly high property prices. He therefore made it clear that he wanted to bring housing prices down, and indirectly wages down, though he did not make the latter explicit. Hong Kong’s return to the Motherland coincided with the Asia-Pacific financial crisis, and the C. H. Tung administration began to preach financial stringency, which intensified deflation. By 2011, the government had accumulated net assets amounting to HK$1.4 trillion; but it is significant that successive administrations have offered no serious plans to make good use of the assets to enhance the territory’s future international competitiveness nor to improve social services to raise the people’s quality of life.

Though the community’s grievances and protests finally forced C. H. Tung to step down, his successor did not seem to have learnt the lesson. Donald Tsang in June 2005 insisted that efforts to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor were bound to do more harm than good. In his final policy address, he admitted that “the wealth gap has given rise to the demand for income redistribution,” and it “has become a structural cause for social tension”. But he immediately jumped to the conclusion that it “is simply not feasible to support a significant increase in recurrent welfare expenditure by raising taxes or issuing bonds”26. It was exactly this arrogance, laziness, and unwillingness to engage the community for discussion that made Hong Kong people angry. The older generations embraced a self-reliance spirit; they believed that through their own hard work, they would be able to solve their own problems. Today the younger generations consider that the government has a significant role in helping them meet their challenges ahead, ranging from housing to their children’s education, hospital services, provisions
for their retirement, and so on.

Hong Kong people understand that they cannot expect a Scandi-
vian welfare society model, but it is only natural that they compare their welfare with what their counterparts in Singapore and Macau receive. They realize that the government cannot raise taxes by a big margin, but they have reason to doubt why Donald Tsang had to promise the business community to lower the corporate tax rate in his reelection bid. His administration’s stubborn refusal to re-launch the Home Ownership Scheme and cutting back of the supply of public rental housing were especially criticized for the neglect of people’s livelihood and serving the interests of the powerful real estate tycoons.

On the other hand, during the tenure of the Donald Tsang administration, distributing small gifts to various segments of the population became routine. These usual “candies” included payment of one or two months rents for public housing tenants, an extra one-month allowance for recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, an Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance, rates waiver, electricity rate subsidies, and so on. These “candies” obviously pleased various socioeco-

nomic groups, though with diminishing returns. But the path-dependence impact is significant; and whether they like it or not, Donald Tsang’s successors will find it very difficult to terminate these supposedly one-off measures. In years of prosperity when government budget surpluses are substantial, people ask for government to share the community’s wealth; and in years of economic difficulties, people ask for help from the government to ease their plight. Political parties reinforce these demands as they also present their requests in their consultations with the administration to please their respective supporters. These “candies” cannot play a significant role in minimizing the community’s grievances. Increasingly, Hong Kong people believe that the inaction of the HKSAR government to tackle their livelihood issues is related to its eagerness to please the business community. Their anger grows because, on one hand, the previous deterrence of investors’ leaving the territory has been diminishing, and on the other hand, more and more people realize that their own efforts may no longer be adequate to solve their problems, housing being an obvious example.

The British colonial administration used to assume the role of aggre-
gating interests. While major British business groups were given privil-
leges like having representatives in the Executive Council, their influences in both the government and the market had been in decline since the
1970s in view of the rise of local business groups. Since the return of the territory to the Motherland, the latter have become increasingly influential in the HKSAR government’s policy-making processes.

In the first place, their assets grow and some of them have gradually emerged as world-class business groups. They also have substantial investment projects in Mainland China. As local business leaders remain the key targets of the Chinese authorities’ united front, the chief executive and leading government officials understand that local business leaders have more chances of meeting Chinese leaders than they do. The latter often consult local business leaders on the performance of the HKSAR government and the potential candidates for the future chief executive position. Hong Kong people naturally become suspicious when many senior government officials join major corporations upon retirement.

There has been increasing concern of a “collusion between top officials and the tycoons.” After decades of consumer demand, the real estate industry has still failed to disclose the exact measurements of the flats they sell. Families that spent their life earnings on a property were given measurements of “constructing areas,” with actual usable space amounting to 65 percent to 85 percent of the given “construction areas.” The HKSAR government has only issued guidelines that have been implemented only since the beginning of 2013 and not legally binding regulations for the industry. The arrogance of the industry was further demonstrated by its refusal to allow prospective buyers to take actual measurements and photographs of the model flats. After years of charging excessive management fees to MPF (pension fund) contributors, the financial services industry finally agreed to reduce its charges by a small margin. There is obvious room for further reductions, but the government has not exerted pressure on the industry. Finally, in late 2011, small shopkeepers revealed that suppliers had threatened to cut off supplies if they sold a certain brand of quick noodles at prices below those of two major supermarket chains. Without an effective competition law, consumer rights are not safeguarded.

This increasing concern of a “collusion between top officials and the tycoons” is most vividly exposed in the government’s housing policy. Since the bulk of the wealth of the territory’s richest tycoons has come from the real estate industry, land supply and the public housing policy are perceived to be related to these tycoons’ fortunes. After the initial years of the C. H. Tung administration, the HKSAR government greatly
reduced its commitment in the provision of public housing and became more relaxed in preparing new land supply for the private sector. These policy orientations had driven up housing prices significantly since their recovery from the SARS epidemic in 2003.\textsuperscript{29} Hong Kong people acutely realize that Singaporeans have been enjoying much better housing conditions, and the significant difference can be explained only in terms of government policy. Even middle-class families who have no financial difficulties understand that their housing conditions could have been considerably improved if the government had performed better in land supply. When the C. Y. Leung administration pledged to improve housing for the people, it could not do much for at least four or five years because of the time lag between increasing land supply at the policy level and the actual delivery of housing units to meet the people’s demand.

In the eyes of ordinary people, the legitimacy deficit of the HKSAR government has been deteriorating, not only because of its unsatisfactory performance, but also because of its lack of concern for the interests of ordinary people who do not think that the government is accountable to them. This legitimacy deficit in turn has created new problems. In the first place, this legitimacy deficit has led to the government’s general reluctance to tackle controversial policies. For example, at this stage, the MPF is inadequate as a pension system for retirement. While Hong Kong people are accustomed to relying on their savings, the improvement in life expectancy and the crises in the financial markets are causes for worry. Middle-class families are also concerned with the provision of hospital services in the public sector as their savings may not be adequate for long-term serious illnesses.

The Donald Tsang administration did not offer any plans to strengthen the MPF scheme as additional payments from employers and employees were bound to be unpopular. Instead, it merely offered incentives to encourage people to acquire private sector health insurance. The proposal is not well received as people in general cannot afford it and believe that public hospitals have to serve them. Middle-class families welcome the limited incentives, but would rather the government assume the burden of running the insurance system.\textsuperscript{30} The C. Y. Leung administration has been in political trouble since its inauguration and is in no position to tackle these major policies yet.

The legitimacy deficit of the HKSAR government generates the need for Beijing to support it often, and its unpopularity has spread to
the central government. In 2013, the lobbying of legislators to support the C. Y. Leung administration by the Central Liaison Office (the central government’s agency in Hong Kong) has become an open secret, so much so that the pro-Beijing media have to defend it as legitimate. This constant interferences in Hong Kong has its adverse impact. From 1997 to 2008, Hong Kong people’s identification with the Chinese nation and their trust for the central government had been strengthening, according to public opinion surveys; but both trends have been reversed since then, and the respective declines have been sharpening in the recent two years. The intermediate-term and long-term impact of the central government’s support for the HKSAR government at critical moments may well be weakened.

Finally, in the first year of the C. Y. Leung administration, its low popularity has resulted in a few of its team members keeping a distance from it, including the convener of the Executive Council, Eden Lam Woon-kwong, in the controversial issue of free-to-air television licenses. This is undeniably a sign of weakness on the part of the HKSAR government. In sum, these new problems represent a vicious cycle indicating that the legitimacy deficit of the government further weakens it and its ability to deliver, leading to a worsening of its legitimacy deficit.

Criticisms against the HKSAR government and the three administrations since 1997 have been planted, but constructive proposals have been rare. In the recent Chief Executive election in 2012, the campaign strategies of both C. Y. Leung and Henry Tang focused on their respective opponents’ scandals; unfortunately the focus of the media was the same, and there were no meaningful deliberations on policy measures to arrest the deteriorating living standards and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. In his second policy address delivered on 15 January 2014, chief executive C. Y. Leung offered a policy package amounting to HK$20 billion of recurrent expenditure per annum to help various underprivileged groups. The package on the whole was well received, though there were arguments on the impact of the aging society and slower economic growth rates on the depletion of fiscal reserves.

There has been no serious community-wide discussion on the impact of such policy measures on radical politics in the territory. Meanwhile, there has been considerable media discussion on the increasing political polarization in the community and, to a lesser extent, the political fragmentation within the establishment and the prodemocracy camp. Quarrels among political groups within each camp and with individual
political parties are now common phenomena. The Legislative Council electoral system has facilitated the election of radical candidates through the multiseat, single-vote constituencies with up to nine seats up for grabs in New Territories West. There have been some analyses of election results and election strategies. But the relationship between political fragmentation and the Legislative Council electoral system on one hand and the emergence of radical politics on the other deserves more original research.

While the emergence and exacerbation of political radicalization in Hong Kong has attracted a lot of attention and generated considerable concern, there is also a strong view that local political radicalism is not radical at all, compared with that in the stable Western democracies and that in other developing countries. While the popularity of political leaders and the legitimacy of the government have been in decline, the social policy programs articulated by the pro-democracy parties are still quite conservative by European standards. In many protest rallies, there are calls for the resignation of the incumbent chief executive and related ministers, but the political demands are for democratization of the electoral systems and not the overthrow of the existing socioeconomic system. Concern about the territory’s political radicalism mainly centers on the ineffective governance and failure to introduce new policy programs on the part of the administration because of the political polarization and fragmentation.

3. The Emergence of New Social Movements
The body of literature on the emergence of new social movements (NSMs) in Hong Kong is still developing; there is naturally the argument that their “newness” has been exaggerated. Their ideological orientation is perhaps the most important characteristic differentiating them from their predecessors; this ideological orientation is reflected by the NSMs’ objectives, organizational structures, and action patterns. Postmaterialism and libertarianism are considered to have an important influence on them.

In the case of Taiwan, the educated segment of the population realizes that the chances of ordinary people becoming rich are often limited, and it has sought satisfaction through active participation in civil society activities in the recent two decades or so. Despite some disappointment with the performance of political parties and political leaders after the
achievement of democracy, this participation has not been adversely affected. These phenomena have not yet appeared in Hong Kong, though university students seem to be politically more active in recent years.

C. H. Tung, the first chief executive of the HKSAR, understood the limitations of materialism: that is, in a mature economy, people cannot expect respectable growth in per capita incomes continuously. He attempted to appeal to Confucianism with limited impact. More realistically, there may well emerge a new type of neighborhood groups. Given the acute need for emotional support in a highly competitive society where work pressure is substantial, a sense of loneliness and alienation is widespread. Single parents, retirees, young people who are well educated and ready for some volunteer work, and others form a substantial pool of potential members ready to group together in service of the neighborhood. These people are distinct from members of the existing grassroots groups in that they are financially better off and do not plan to seek help directly from the government. They do not intend to take an active part in politics, but they want a meaningful interaction with the community through which they seek mutual help, emotional support, and satisfaction through service. Today, religious organizations come the closest to satisfying this demand, but obviously there is much room for similar secular groups to develop.37

The above type of neighborhood groups have not yet emerged in Hong Kong in any significant scale, the pro-Beijing united front has, to some extent, filled this gap. The Chinese authorities began publicly building their Hong Kong community network and influence in 1985 when the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency opened three district offices on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon and the New Territories. Pro-Beijing political forces mounted a campaign to block the introduction of direct elections to the Legislative Council in 1988. They also mobilized their supporters, identified candidates, and isolated political opponents in the district board elections in March 1988. The pro-Beijing united front suffered a severe setback because of the Tiananmen Incident, and this was reflected in the sweeping electoral victory of the prodemocracy political groups in the 1991 elections to the Legislative Council.38 Since then, the pro-Beijing political groups have gradually recovered. These groups did not perform well in the 1995 Legislative Council elections in terms of seats won, but they altogether secured 34 percent of the vote and their mobilization power was impressive in a number of ways.
In subsequent years, the performance of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) and the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU) has shown that the community service offered by the pro-Beijing groups has been rewarded. Given their financial resources, they continue to gradually expand their grassroots network. Moreover, the pro-Beijing united front can also reward their supporters with honors such as memberships in the National People’s Congress, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and their provincial counterparts as well as appointments to the HKSAR government’s advisory committees. By the mid-1990s, the Chinese authorities had already established their system of honors for the Hong Kong community. Such efforts and resources have laid a good foundation for the pro-Beijing political groups.

In the recent decade, the pro-Beijing united front has already built a very sophisticated electoral machinery similar to the People’s Action Party in Singapore. The services delivered at the grassroots level have sometimes been summed up as “snake-soup banquets in winter, vegetarian meals for the elderly, moon-cakes during the Mid-autumn Festival, and rice dumplings during the Dragon Boat Festival.” District councilors of the united front arrange visits to the poor elderly in the public housing estates almost monthly with a bag of rice, a bottle of cooking oil, and a bottle of soy sauce for each. These visits bring warmth and comfort to the elderly. As a result, the prodemocracy camp now holds slightly over 80 seats in the HKSAR’s eighteen District Councils out of a total of over 400, and they are in the minority in every District Council. This situation leaves very little room for service-oriented moderate civil groups to develop at the grassroots level.

Hence radical civil groups develop at the other end of the political spectrum. These social activists are disappointed with the prodemocracy parties too, partly because they resent electoral politics that has to accommodate considerations of pleasing voters, seeking publicity, and making compromises so as to secure partial results and avoid failures. There were unhappy experiences of past cooperation because of the above. Since the design of the Basic Law normally provides a safe majority support for the administration in the legislature, the prodemocracy political parties have not been involved in the policy-making process in a meaningful way since 1997, cooperation with them is not very helpful in securing concessions from the government. The NSMs therefore tend to contest individual issues on their own.39
The NSMs want to develop loose nonhierarchical forms of organization, and they value the experiences of participation and the community spirit almost as much as achieving their policy objectives. Typically they develop collective decision-making processes, appeal to the community through skilful media strategies to win public opinion support, reject the mediation of political parties and politicians, demand direct dialogues with the government and power holders, and are willing to engage in confrontational action. As observed by Ma Ngok, they seek to avoid the contamination of partisan politics and the cooperation by the government in order to maintain the purity of their causes.

In the recent decade or so, the annual number of reported protests increased from under 100 before the millennium to around 200 during this century. One explanation naturally has been the deteriorating living standards and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor discussed in section 1 of this article. Dissatisfaction and grievances accumulate in society, especially among young people, who also suffer from the decline in opportunities for upward social mobility. Takis S. Pappas observes the significance of another factor in his study of the emergence of radical mass movements in democracy.

Hong Kong is not a democracy. But beginning in the 1970s, the British administration gradually established a system of advisory bodies to absorb interest groups into the policy-making process. The moderate political culture in the territory encouraged policy grievances and controversies to be settled within the formal institutional framework. The decline in legitimacy on the part of the HKSAR government discussed in section 2 has adversely affected the effectiveness of this “administrative absorption” process, giving rise to radical mass movements.

Pappas attempts to link radical action at the mass level with strategic choices at the elite level, explaining the former in terms of the symbolic-cum-strategic action of individual political entrepreneurs employing specific frames to mobilize the masses. He examines three cases: Andreas Papandreou in Greece in the 1970s, Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in the 1980s, and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in the 1990s. He analyzes how they were able to construct subversive ideological messages and mobilize radical political action, that is, how creative symbolic power could become a powerful political resource. “When this creativity is particularly original,” argues Abner Cohen, “when it helps to articulate or objectify new groupings and new relations,” we become faced with charismatic leaders.
Most Hong Kong people are very ignorant about the above three cases, but young people in the territory are familiar with the charisma of radical political leaders like Long Hair Leung Kwok-hung and Raymond Wong Yuk-man. In the last Legislative Council elections in September 2012, People Power, led by Raymond Wong, and the League of Social Democrats, led by Leung Kwok-hung, won 264,000 votes, compared with 255,000 votes for the Civic Party and 247,000 votes for the Democratic Party.47 Leung and Wong have replaced Emily Lau Wai-hing as radical political leaders attracting the support of the angry young people, though Lau was perceived as the anti-Beijing firebrand or the most radical legislator when she first entered the Legislative Council in 1991.

Conservative Hong Kong people are not happy with the frequent protests, and the pro-Beijing media lament this phenomenon and label the territory as “the capital of protests.” Then Secretary for Security Ambrose Lee Siu-kwong criticized the young activists for “seriously undermining” the rule of law.48 Yet the community understands that the territory’s protest activities are mild compared with those in major Western cities. At the academic level, Chantal Mouffe argues that when a society lacks a dynamic public space allowing for agonistic confrontation among diverse political identities, a more nefarious space may open, where alienation generates alternative identifications along antagonistic divides like nationalism, religion, and ethnicity.49 At this stage, rule of law and freedom of the media have been well maintained in the territory because all parties concerned realize that their maintenance is essential to the functioning of Hong Kong as an international financial center and international business service center. There are concerns regarding some signs of deterioration, but all civil society groups believe they enjoy ample freedom to articulate their causes and grievances. The real issues are increasing political polarization and the grave doubts regarding the political will of the administration to tackle the controversial policy challenges.

It has to be admitted that the existing literature has not been able to establish the organic linkage between poverty, social inequalities, and so forth on one hand and actual political radical actions on the other, though incidents of protest activities and related minor conflicts with the police have been on the rise. Arguably a correlation can be established, but the causal effect has not been well analyzed. After all, the number of radical political activists in the territory remains very small. There are some in-depth interviews of university students and young people at the postgraduate theses level, but published works are almost absent.
a. Dockers’ Strike, 2013

Not all NSMs in Hong Kong are postmaterialist; in the general climate of radicalization, trade unions have also been emboldened. In early May 2013, a 40-day strike involving hundreds of crane operators and stevedores inside the Kwai Tsing Container Terminal ended with a small victory for the workers, securing a 9.8 percent wage increase. The dockers’ strike was the largest industrial action in recent years. It is significant in that it attracted a lot of media attention and public support on an unprecedented scale. The strike collected public donations of more than HK$8 million; and student organizations, both in high schools and tertiary institutions, actively showed their support. The donations helped the dockers on strike to hang on. The community normally does not show a strong support for trade unionism and tends to believe in market forces. Moreover, the dockers’ wages were not low by Hong Kong standards. But this time civil society and members of the public were mobilized to attend demonstrations and rallies in support of the striking workers. For the latter, it was also a significant moment of political reengagement; after the strike, the workers continued participating in other political events such as the 1 July demonstration to demand collective bargaining rights and democracy.

Collective bargaining rights of trade unions are not recognized in Hong Kong, reflecting their weaknesses and the power of capital. One of the last acts of the Patten administration was to legislate such rights; and the provisional legislature of the HKSAR immediately revoked them in its first months. It reflects the political contradictions in Hong Kong when the Communist Party regime in Beijing cares more for investors’ interests than workers’ rights, and when the HKFTU dares not speak for the very basic right of trade unions after becoming part of the political establishment. Hence major employers can still simply ignore workers who group together to make demands.

Legally, the striking workers were negotiating with the contractors of the container terminal, but the workers and their supporters protested against the major business group Hutchison Whampoa Ltd. and the richest man in Hong Kong, Li Ka-shing. Li was a folk hero in the 1970s, as he was perceived to make his own fortunes and take over from the British hongs on behalf of the local business community. In the eyes of the protestors, he is now seen as a very rich man exploiting the workers. This changing perception is sometimes labeled as the “hate the rich”
syndrome, and is obviously a reflection of anger over the disparity between the rich and poor. The prodemocracy movement certainly uses this as a good example to illustrate the strong linkage between democracy and people’s livelihood.

b. Hong Kong Autonomy Movement

Orthodox ideologies often have a limited appeal in Hong Kong. Leung Kwok-hung is a rare example of a political leader who puts his cause within a socialist frame. As Europe enters a significant phase of reintegration of East and West, it faces an increasing problem with the rise of far-right political parties. Immigration is often the major controversy triggering riots. As can be expected, there are no far-right political groups in this cosmopolitan metropolis. But the rising tensions between Hong Kong people and Mainlanders have given rise to the Hong Kong Autonomy Movement and a similar group called Hong Kong Nativism Power.

As two communities interact closely, misunderstandings easily arise. Naturally when more than 40 million tourists from Mainland China visit Hong Kong every year, the territory becomes very crowded, causing resentment among the locals. While tourism is a major pillar of the economy, most Hong Kong people do not feel they have benefitted directly from it. Instead they believe that this influx has caused considerable inconveniences. Commercial premises in districts most frequented by tourists tend to command higher rents, driving up prices and forcing the relocation of small businesses serving the locals. Mainland tourists’ massive purchases of baby formula caused a shortage of supply for mothers with infants, resulting in an uproar and embarrassment for the HKSAR government. Some Hong Kong people are upset that workers at expensive luxury goods outlets treat Mandarin-speaking customers better. In the extreme cases, some angry Hong Kongers have called Mainlanders “locusts,” and a Beijing University professor Kong Qing-dong called Hong Kong people “dogs.”

There are materialistic issues of public-sector resources too. The Donald Tsang administration’s promotion of the medical care sector providing services for foreign visitors as an export of service has produced some undesirable side effects. Thousands of pregnant women have come to Hong Kong to give birth to babies in private hospitals so that their children will secure Hong Kong resident status. Private
hospitals have to recruit pediatric doctors and nurses from public hospitals, resulting in a deterioration of services in the public sector for the locals. Subsequently, these children have come to Hong Kong for their education, causing a shortage of spots for kindergarten in the northern New Territories near the border.

With the emergence of organizations like the Hong Kong Autonomy Movement, the grievances and emotions have been raised to the political level. Chin Wan, the principal theoretician of the movement, argued in May 2011 that the Tiananmen Incident aroused Hong Kong people’s fear of China, and the prodemocracy movement proposed the idea of “democratic resistance against communism.” But Chin criticized the Democratic Party for its conciliatory approach at this stage, and appealed for a strong stand on Hong Kong autonomy. He and his supporters then blamed the Individual Visit Scheme, the National Education project, and so on for the escalation of tensions between Mainland China and Hong Kong.

Support for the movement has been considerably enhanced by the opposition to the increasing interferences in Hong Kong on the part of the Chinese authorities. There is a serious concern that these interferences threaten the freedom and lifestyle that Hong Kong people cherish. The movement obviously touches on the sensitivities of Beijing, which is worried about the separatist movements in Tibet and Xinjiang as well as the independence orientations in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The pro-Beijing united front is particularly angry with the movement’s lion and dragon flag, adopted and modified from the British colonial flag. The explicit anger, however, seems to have been encouraging more such flag bearers in the territory’s protest rallies in recent years.

c. Occupy Central Movement

Supporters of the prodemocracy movement in Hong Kong have been angry and frustrated in the past two or three decades with the lack of progress in democratization; and this anger and frustration are vividly reflected in the Occupy Central Movement. The standing Committee of the National People’s Congress released its decision on 29 December 2007 in response to the prodemocracy movement’s demand for a timetable and a road map. It states, “appropriate amendments may be made to the specific method for selecting the fourth chief executive and the specific method for forming the fifth term Legislative Council of the
HKSAR in the year of 2012. The election of the fifth chief executive of the HKSAR in the year 2017 may be implemented by the method of universal suffrage; that after the chief executive is selected by universal suffrage, the election of the Legislative Council of the HKSAR may be implemented by the method of electing all the members by universal suffrage.”\textsuperscript{54} The decision thus offers Hong Kong people the hope that the earliest possible dates to practice universal suffrage in the election of the chief executive and the entire Legislative Council would be 2017 and 2020, respectively.

The prodemocracy movement does not feel reassured by this offer, and there is a strong worry that though Hong Kong people may be granted the right of electing the chief executive by universal suffrage by 2017, they may be able to elect only from a list of candidates approved by the Chinese authorities. This fear has been much exacerbated by the remarks of Qiao Xiaoyang, chairman of the Law Committee of the National People’s Congress, in a closed-door seminar on the Hong Kong Basic Law, attended by the proestablishment legislators in Shenzhen on 24 March 2013. Qiao declared that “any members from the opposition camp who insist on confronting the central government cannot become the Chief Executive of Hong Kong.”\textsuperscript{55} Qiao seemed to be suggesting that a screening mechanism would be in place to select the candidates for the chief executive in 2017. Qiao further elaborated that “Chief Executive candidates must be persons who love the country and love Hong Kong” and that “those who confront the central government would fail to qualify.”\textsuperscript{56}

It was in this context that Benny Tai from the Law School of the University of Hong Kong proposed the idea of the Occupy Central Movement in his \textit{Hong Kong Economic Journal} column in January 2013. Tai further reiterated the idea in the \textit{South China Morning Post} in early February 2013 about his plan to rally tens of thousands of protesters to block the roads in Central in July 2014. Tai hoped that the protest would rally support from the public and exert pressure on Beijing to allow democracy for the territory. Tai’s proposal is based on the belief that unless Hong Kong people are willing to sacrifice and engage in political struggle, the Chinese authorities will not concede democracy to them. The campaign ignited the enthusiasm of the prodemocracy supporters, and the idea has developed into a movement exactly because the participants are convinced that democracy is not a gift bestowed from above.
The philosophical paradigm of the Occupy Central Movement comes from the concept of deliberative democracy advocated by James Fishkin. Tai and his team emphasize rational discussion through deliberation day exercises to find a consensus on the method of electing the chief executive while the civil disobedience campaign serves as last resort. According to Fishkin, deliberative democracy offers the entire nation the opportunities for thoughtful interaction and opinion formation that are normally restricted to small-group democracy. Deliberative democracy brings the face-to-face democracy of ordinary citizens who can participate on the same basis of political equality as that offered by the ancient Athenian Assembly. The most important element of deliberative democracy is to identify the “refined public opinion” that would result from more thoughtful interactions. This certainly is a significant attraction and a rewarding experience to those in Hong Kong who seek meaningful political participation.

The movement, as expected, has attracted severe criticisms from the pro-Beijing united front, and it is perceived as a direct challenge to the Chinese authorities. The latter probably have the “Arab Spring” in mind and are concerned with the movement’s demonstration effect in China. The entire united front has been mobilized to condemn it. According to a series of public opinion surveys by Ming Pao, support for the movement rose from 25 percent of the respondents in April 2013 to 32 percent in July and fell back to 25 percent in October, while those who opposed fell from 51 percent in April 2013 to 46 percent in July and increased again to 55 percent in October. Given the territory’s moderate political culture, support for a civil disobedience campaign severely condemned by Beijing is not expected to be high; even a support rate of 25 percent already deserves close attention by the Chinese authorities and the HKSAR government.

The emergence of NSMs and radical politics is a relatively new political development in the territory, and more research outputs are anticipated in the coming years. Detailed and systematic research on the formation, objectives, organizations, modes of mobilization, leadership, and strategies of different radical groups is still rare. Two specific areas probably deserve more attention. The ideas and strategies of their leaders and activists are much influenced by Western philosophers; this influence and the local adaptation processes are significant in a better understanding of NSMs and radical politics in the territory. In-depth interviews of these leaders and activists would be valuable. Comparisons
between NSMs and radical politics in the territory and those in East Asia as well as those in relevant countries should be illuminating; and this work probably has not yet begun. NSMs in Hong Kong may also have a potential impact on the development of civil society in China, which will have much more significant global effects. Research in this area is related to the future democratization process in Hong Kong as this impact is a concern on the part of the Chinese leadership.

4. Radical Politics and Effective Governance

In the recent one or two years, Hong Kong people have been complaining in unison about local politics as their frustrations grow. Their dissatisfaction has been centering broadly on the decline in Hong Kong’s international economic competitiveness and the inefficiency of the government. Both have been gradual processes since 1997 or so and are related to the “legitimacy deficit” of the HKSAR government discussed in section 2 of this article. As observed by Ian Scott, policy stalemate or, even worse, policy inertia in the sense that the administration tends to avoid initiating major policy proposals or controversial ones becomes increasingly frequent.  

The pro-Beijing united front severely blames the prodemocracy camp and the radical political movements for the problems of the administration, focusing on their protest activities and the filibustering and other delaying tactics in the legislature. However, in view of the design of the Basic Law and the actual distribution of seats in the Legislative Council, if the administration and the political establishment can get their act together, the prodemocracy camp cannot effectively block the policy-making process. After all, it too has to respect the trends of public opinion.

The scandals surrounding C. Y. Leung and the resignations and scandals of several members of his team gave rise to a lot of rumors about quarrels at the top of the government. Those who had supported Leung’s candidacy wanted to see reforms and improvements, but the old guards of the civil service accorded a priority to preserving proper procedures and their way of doing things. These internal divisions have affected the administration’s ability to deliver; for example, it had to back down even on a simple plan to restructure the government.

Top Chinese leaders appealed for reconciliation immediately after the 2012 chief executive election, and certainly C. Y. Leung would like
to secure the support of the entire establishment. But the appeal seemed to have limited success. Even the strong bond of the pro-Beijing united front seems to have been eroded. The staunchly pro-Beijing monthly the Mirror severely criticized Rita Fan Hsu Lai-tai in its December 2012 issue for attacking the chief executive. Cheng Yiu-tong, of the HKFTU revealed that members had withdrawn from the federation because they were disappointed by the position of popular legislator Chan Yuen-han on the proposed extra allowance for the elderly.

A weak administration naturally depends more on support from the Chinese authorities. But Hong Kong people’s attitude toward the central government and their identity with the Chinese nation have been deteriorating. Actually from 1997 to 2008 (according to public opinion surveys), Hong Kong people’s trust in the central government and their identity with the Chinese nation were strengthening; both trends, however, have reversed since then, and the declines have even become sharper in the recent two years or so. In May 2013, a poll by the University of Hong Kong indicated that Hong Kong people who held negative attitudes toward the central government increased from 25 percent in November 2012 to 37 percent, those who held positive attitudes decreased from 29 percent to 20 percent in the same period.61 In the following month immediately after the 4 June candlelight vigil, another survey by the University of Hong Kong revealed that the community’s identification with the Chinese nation dropped to a 14-year low. Respondents who identified themselves as “Hong Kongers” amounted to 38 percent, 11 percent higher than six months ago; those who identified themselves as Chinese rose 2 percent to 23 percent in the same period; while those who identified themselves as “Chinese of Hong Kong” or “Hong Kongers of China” reached 36 percent, showing a decline of 13 percent.62

The vast majority of Hong Kong people, however, have no intention to confront the Chinese authorities, and they are proud of China’s rising international status; furthermore, they are grateful for Beijing’s support of the territory’s economy in terms of policy concessions. As usual, it is the moderation and pragmatism of ordinary Hong Kong people that has contributed to political stability by punishing, through public opinion, the parties that are out of line.

Radical political participation in this sense has a limited market in Hong Kong. There is considerable worry and resentment in the community against the mode of political articulation and expression on the part
of the League of Social Democrats, People Power, and some young radical activists of the “post-80s” generation. At this stage, the territory’s moderate political culture is still an effective deterrent against radical political action, but there is worry that as young people become more frustrated with their career prospects, the number of young radical activists will grow. On the other hand, tolerance is the best way to contain radical political participation. Suppression tends to be counterproductive in the long term, especially when it is implemented by an unpopular government in “legitimacy deficit.”

In the eyes of most Hong Kong people, political reform has become the endgame. The old arguments that political reform has to be gradual and that conditions may not yet be ripe have, by now, lost all credibility. The widening gap between the rich and the poor, the decline in opportunities for young people to move up the socioeconomic ladder, the worsening housing problems, and the increasing inadequacy of our pension and health care systems not only exacerbate the community’s frustrations and grievances but also make people realize that the C. Y. Leung administration lacks the political support needed to tackle such issues. Worse still, people do not believe that the administration can get back this support.

All parties concerned increasingly realize that the failure of reaching agreement on political reform would hurt Hong Kong badly. The incumbent chief executive and the person elected in 2017 would lack legitimacy in the eyes of most people, and he or she would not have the mandate or political support to implement badly needed reforms. Effective governance may be difficult. The prodemocracy groups would not benefit from such difficulties. They would in all likelihood be divided and would be unable to play any constructive role. Such worries have generated renewed talk of emigrating, which had subsided after the mid-1990s, especially among young professionals.

In the 2012 chief executive election, there was a view that whoever elected would have great difficulties governing Hong Kong. It reflected the concern about the political polarization and the accumulated grievances in the community. With regard to the NSMs, the HKSAR government was no longer able to contain or absorb the politics of policymaking. The NSMs offer new values, issues and demands which have not been well-anticipated by the government and the established political parties, including those of the prodemocracy camp.63

The impressive protest rallies on 20 October 2013 against the C. Y.
Leung administration’s refusal to issue a free-to-air broadcast license to Hong Kong Television Network were a good demonstration of the influence and mobilization power of the Internet in building ad hoc united fronts without the involvement of established groups. They were also a good example of the HKSAR government’s failure “to aggregate demands and to gauge possible public responses to policy initiatives” in situations where “objections to its proposals often arouse after the formal period of consultation had taken place.”

The difficulties encountered by the HKSAR government have been considered by several academics. Anthony B. L. Cheung observes that “the conventional methods of administrative absorption and advisory politics began to give way to outright political agitation, protest and bargaining,” and that the NSM groups are “also taking the issues to the courts and using judicial review as an extended political arena for agenda setting and bargaining.” Agnes Shuk-mei Ku argues that the ideological divergence between government officials and civil society groups has been widening; and that the latter are “looking for and articulating a new mode of state-society relations that outgrows the conventional mode of citizenship.”

On the whole, however, the NSMs and the prodemocracy camp still find it hard to challenge the government because the policy process “remains in the hands of a centralized bureaucracy.” If the establishment maintains solidarity and can get its act together, the policy capacity of the HKSAR government should not seriously suffer. Kai Hon Ng reaches the conclusion that the extent to which NSMs can challenge the government’s “policy capacity depends on the meso-level political structures in which social activists have to operate.”

The administrative absorption of politics has been a main theme in the study of the territory’s political development, but the administrative absorption of radical politics probably has not yet been studied both at the policy level and the academic level. In Western democracies, there have been many examples of radical environmental groups evolving into green parties and eventually joining governing coalitions. Apparently these processes have not been examined by the establishment at the policy level nor by the local academic community. To contain the political fragmentation discussed above, the administrative absorption of radical politics calls for political vision preceded by research and public deliberations at the community level.

The influence of radical politics in the local democratization process
is significant; the role of the Occupy Central Movement and the radical political groups in the campaign for genuine democracy in 2013–2014 is obvious, and will probably be examined in the research on the campaign in the near future. How the recent emergence of radical politics will shape a segment of the future political leadership of Hong Kong will likely be a research topic in the intermediate-term future.

5. Conclusion

This review article has surveyed the rich body of literature that local academics have already produced on the emergence of radical politics in Hong Kong. Evidence on the deteriorating living standards and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor has been substantial. Apparently the issue of poverty emerged in the final years of the last century and has been attracting increasing attention in the social welfare field as well. A literature review by the Legislative Council Secretariat in 2005 on poverty issues listed 27 major articles; only one of them was published before 1990, while 16 appeared between 1995 and 1999.71

Poverty generates grievances especially in the context of the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor and the perception of the collusion between top officials and big businesses. Under such circumstances, people naturally blame the government. In the eyes of the community, the performance of all three chief executives failed to meet its expectations. Their respective philosophies were not in accord with the people’s values. Worse still, while most Hong Kong people believe that C. H. Tung’s heart was in the right place, they do not think that Tung’s successors had such qualifications. They have been especially angry with government policies favoring the business community, and the phenomena of “greed” and corruption of the Donald Tsang and C. Y. Leung administrations reported by the media. The “legitimacy deficit” of the HKSAR government has been a root cause giving rise to radical politics. This article admittedly has not been able to cover the massive and interesting materials on the people’s grievances against the Hong Kong government.

The local academics’ analysis of the rise of NSMs owes much to Western theories, which have offered useful theoretical frameworks. There are some comparisons between the local groups and their counterparts in Western and Asian countries; but these are not systematic. The consensus on the origins, characteristics, modes of operation, and so on
of the NSMs is strong; and the same applies to the failure of the government to anticipate and absorb their challenges.

While the literature surveyed reveals a common concern about political polarization as well as the decline in legitimacy and effective governance of the HKSAR government, the degree of pessimism varies. Confidence on the maintenance of social stability remains high, but there is little optimism that the performance of the government will soon improve.

Notes
2. In 2001, there were 176,000 employees in this category, 6 percent of the workforce.
8. South China Morning Post, 10 January 2007; and Ming Pao, 10 January 2007.
11. The data come from the Legislative Council Factsheet FS07/04-05,
12. *Ming Pao*, 20 September 2010. Their monthly income is less than half of the median monthly income of families in Hong Kong with the same number of members.

13. *Ming Pao*, 4 October 2010. Poor families in this research report are defined as those with incomes equal to or less than half of the median incomes of families in Hong Kong with the same number of members, for example, one-person families during the survey period with monthly incomes of HK$3,275 or less, two-person families with monthly incomes of HK$7,100 or less, three-person families with monthly incomes of HK$10,000 or less, four-person families with monthly incomes of HK$12,000 or less.


16. *Ming Pao*, 13 September 2010. The survey was conducted by a consultancy firm commissioned by the Hong Kong Association of Professionals and Senior Executives from May to July 2010.


21. In 1988, the governor, Sir David (later Lord) Wilson, stated that growth in the civil service was to be restricted and its “ministerial” structure was being reviewed by international management consultants. Sir David Wilson, Hong Kong Hansard, 7 October 1987, p. 46.


24. Chan Yuen-han, probably the most respected politician in the pro-Beijing united front, for example, supported self-help on behalf of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions as a solution for unemployment and suggested allowing the jobless to become street food vendors. See Chan Yuen-han, Federation of Trade Unions, *Hong Kong Hansard*, 16 November 2005, p. 2059.
27. In his re-election policy platform in early 2007, Donald Tsang indicated that he aimed to reduce both the profit tax rate and salary tax rate to 15 percent. In the following October, he reduced the profit tax rate from 17.5 percent to 16.5 percent and the salary tax rate from 16 percent to 15 percent. See *The Standard*, 9 October 2007.
31. See *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po*, 8 November 2013.
32. *Wen Wei Po*, 11 November 2013; see especially *Ta Kung Pao* editorial on the same day.
34. See, for example, the 13 articles published in *Ming Pao* between 23 August and 4 October 2012 by Ivan Tsui Chi-keung on the Legislative Council elections in the same year.


42. Kai Hon Ng, “Social Movements and Political Capacity in Hong Kong,” p. 181.


56. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
61. Ming Pao, 5 June 2013.
63. Ian Scott, The Public Sector Reform in Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), pp. 177, 190–194.
64. See all major newspapers in Hong Kong on 21 October 2013.
65. Scott, Public Sector Reform in Hong Kong, pp. 213 and 219.
68. Elisa Wing-yee Lee, “Civil Society Organizations and Local Governance in Hong Kong,” in Wing-kai Chiu and Wong, Repositioning the Hong Kong Government, p. 164.
70. Yeo-chi King, “Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong.”
71. Simon Li, “Information Note. Causes of Poverty in Hong Kong: A Literature Review” (IN16/04-05) (Hong Kong: Legislative Council Secretariat, 10 January 2005), pp. 5–7.