

Political Adaptation of Hong Kong Civil Servants

JERMAIN T. M. LAM*

In view of the political transition of Hong Kong from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under Chinese sovereignty in 1997, this article examines the adaptability of the senior civil servants in Hong Kong. Various political changes have started impinging on the administrative hierarchy since 1991. Although the senior civil servants still dominate the governance of Hong Kong, they are now being scrutinized by the Legislative Council and challenged by the political parties and politicians, the citizens who demand greater participation, and China's intrusion into the decisionmaking process. In general, the study finds that the senior civil servants of Hong Kong are predominantly conservative in adapting to the forthcoming political changes.

Background

Adaptation of the civil service to changes is absolutely essential to maintain a responsive administration and to provide updated services for the community. This applies to both developed and developing societies for the goal of public administration is to formulate effective policies and to render efficient implementation of policies (Rosenbloom 1989; Peters 1989). As the political, economic, and social environments are constantly changing, new demands and interests are continuously emerging from the society. The civil service needs to adapt to the changes in the open environment so that new problems could be resolved and old problems controlled. Easton (1965) puts forward the theory of system analysis to examine how an open system maintains stability and equilibrium or how it leads to instability, disruption, and breakdown. The survival capacity of a system, according to Easton, depends on its adaptability. In responding to the stress on the political system exerted by the old and new demands of the citizenry, a political system has a regulatory mechanism of its own. This regulatory mechanism is a sort of gatekeeping at the boundary of the system to regulate the flow (both quantity and quality) of demands into the decisionmaking black box. Easton points out that the system will break down if the types and contents of output and demands do not correspond to each other.

*Associate Professor, Department of Public and Social Administration, City University of Hong Kong.

Deutsch adds another contribution to the literature on adaptation by advancing the cybernetics analysis. Cybernetics is the systematic study of communication and control in organizations. According to Deutsch (1966), a political system may be viewed essentially as a decision and control system that relies on the exchange of messages and information in both its domestic affairs and its foreign relations. A political system responds to the environmental events or stimuli and performs respective activities. The communication channels that receive information and messages into the decisionmaking system are the "nerves of government." These nerves facilitate the feedback process which produces modified action in response to an input of information. The adaptive ability of any decisionmaking system to invent and to carry out fundamentally new policies to meet new conditions is related to its ability to combine items of information into new patterns in response to a repeated external stimulus (Deutsch 1966). Deutsch regards the growth of adaptability, rather than power, as the most important dimension of the growth of a political system. The task of politics is therefore to accelerate needed innovation, to adjust its position with respect to the environment, and to achieve the changing goals of the society.

Hong Kong is a good case study to examine the adaptability of the civil servants in the political transition from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The colonial administration is the real governing body of the government, with no institutional checks by other political actors (Harris 1978). The elite are coopted into the colonial administration as appointed members of the Executive and Legislative Councils as well as various advisory committees to serve rather than to oppose the bureaucratic regime. The society is depoliticized in the sense that politics is absorbed by administration (King 1975). Decisions are made by administrators rather than elected politicians and the decisionmaking process is a sort of administrative consultation rather than party politics. The senior civil servants working for the policy branches and executive departments are not only administrators who implement policies but are also decisionmakers who control the functions of resource allocation. They dominate the decisionmaking process and play an active role in initiating and drafting policy proposals. As a result, political power has been concentrated in the hands of civil servants who constitute the dominant actors and are almost immune from institutional checking by other political actors (Lau 1982).

Under such an executive-led and centralized system, Hong Kong civil servants exhibit a distinctive set of administrative behavior. For instance, Lau (1982) generalizes several behavioral tendencies of the Hong Kong civil servants as "complacency, defensiveness, formalism and legalism, inflexibility, technicalism, and personalism." Lui (1988) observes that the civil servants in Hong Kong are typically "introverted, technocratic, conservative, apolitical,

and amoral." Lui further points out a set of bureaucratic values prevailing among Hong Kong civil servants. First, ordinary citizens are usually sub-optimized and short-sighted. They need to be guided into accepting what is genuinely in their best interests. Second, the power relationship between the bureaucracy and the public should be founded on paternalistic and hierarchical assumptions based on the superior knowledge possessed by the bureaucracy. Third, administrative decisions should be made by civil servants. Citizens' participation in the administrative process should be kept to a minimum. Fourth, civil servants should only concern themselves with their official duties. It is both undesirable and unnecessary for the civil servants to become engaged in public matters that may tarnish their image of impartiality. Fifth, administrative organizations should remain stable as far as possible. Changes should only be made when necessary and only to the extent that a crisis can be averted. The bureaucracy should adopt a reactive attitude towards external pressures for organizational changes. Sixth, a civil servant owes his loyalty to his superiors who should be the sole judges of his conduct and performance. Civil service morality is therefore a matter of administrative evaluation confined within the hierarchy.

Because of this set of bureaucratic values and behavior, Hong Kong civil servants have been responsible only to their superiors within the administrative hierarchy, and not to political actors outside the administration. Administrative accountability, rather than political accountability, is the dominant value within the civil service. This colonial character of the civil service is congruent with the static political environment in Hong Kong in the last three decades.

Yet Hong Kong civil servants have been challenged by various political changes outside the administrative hierarchy since 1991. The introduction of direct election into the Legislative Council has created a more representative legislature that has demonstrated its will to exert influence on the administration as much as possible. The Legislative Council has been moving away from a passive to an active chamber of discussion, from a dependent to a more independent legislature, and from an obedient to a critical partner of the executive. The development of representative government has also led to the emergence of a number of political organizations and politicians. As channels and opportunities are open for access to political power, political parties are formed to consolidate support and politicians are recruited to gain political power. The elected politicians, based on their popular mandate, are claiming their right to make decisions for the Hong Kong government. In addition, the issue of 1997 has created a series of confidence crises among the general citizens towards the British-Hong Kong and Chinese governments. The general citizens become more conscious of whether their interests are sacrificed by their existing and future sovereign masters, hence articulating more demands on the administration. Furthermore, China has indicated its

intention to participate more in the internal affairs of Hong Kong in the last phase of political transition. China has regarded itself as the vanguard of the people of Hong Kong, thus exercising tremendous influence on major policies going beyond 1997.

As a result, senior civil servants of Hong Kong are facing political pressure exerted from various sources during the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China. They are no longer the only decisionmakers immune from monitoring by other political actors. Although the senior civil servants of Hong Kong are still holding the governing power, they are now encountering the scrutiny of the Legislative Council, the challenges from political parties and politicians, the public demand for more public participation, and the intrusion of China into the decisionmaking process. Such political circumstances will certainly affect the political orientations of senior civil servants. It also raises the question of how the civil servants are adapting to the political changes during the transition to 1997 and beyond. The senior civil servants' orientations to political adjustments are particularly important to a stable and smooth political transition. In this political context, this paper aims to examine the political adaptability of the Hong Kong senior civil servants.

Political Adaptation: Framework of Analysis

With respect to the concept of political adaptation, Christopher Hood offers an analytical framework to examine how the civil service handles change. In the words of Hood (1986: 142), adaptation can be defined as "the ability to spot material changes in circumstances, and the capacity and disposition to respond appropriately to those changes." Thus, adaptation comprises three essential elements: (1) the capacity to recognize change; (2) the capacity to respond; and (3) the disposition to respond. The capacity to recognize change is important for failure to do so may result in serious consequences. If the civil service is not able to recognize actual changes in the environment, the civil service is unlikely to adapt to the new environment by providing new services or modifying the existing policies. The incongruence between the new demands and the old policies would grow large, resulting in worsening of problems or the retardation of development. Adaptation is commonly hampered by failure to distinguish material changes from random disturbances, to identify the turning point in a cycle, to recognize the speed at which change is occurring, and to allow for reactive or strategic change (Hood 1986: 145).

The capacity to respond refers to "the ability in some way to introduce variations into behavior or structure" (Hood 1986: 143). Hood (1986) identifies four possible modes of adaptation. First, piecemeal adjustment is referred to as

"a slight modification of the existing rules and practices to accommodate the new development" (Hood 1986: 151). This approach requires minimal demands on engineering capacity and administration disruption. This approach has the advantages of low cost, minimum risk, and convenience.

Second, recombination denotes "the making of minor modifications to each of a set of well-established elements, rules, routines or operations, so that when added together, a completely different effect is produced or a quite different purpose served" (Hood 1986: 154). This approach incorporates piecemeal adjustment and is mainly a repackaging exercise of producing a new service using similar but modified input materials. It demands a higher administrative engineering capacity, yet the potential disruption to existing operations remains low.

Third, imitation is "the copying of a basic design which has shown itself to be workable elsewhere" (Hood 1986: 156). This approach requires a relatively low administrative engineering capacity since a formula is just copied and put into operation from one context to another. However, this may involve the abolition of the old system and the installation of the new system, hence leading to a higher degree of potential disruption to existing operations.

Fourth, prototyping is "the creation of an original design all at once as a self-contained and purpose-built unit" (Hood 1986: 157). It does not involve significant copying or modification of an existing system. This adaptive approach makes heavy demands on administrative engineering capacity since tremendous effort and energy are required to invent and to test a new system through trial and error. It also causes immense disruption to the existing system as the old system would be totally replaced and uprooted by the new system. Piecemeal adjustment and imitation involve a lower cost of adaptation in terms of the engineering knowledge and skill required to bring out a change. In terms of disruption to existing operations in replacing some current system by an alternative one, piecemeal adjustment and recombination would involve a lower cost of adaptation. The four modes of adaptation are summarized in Table 1.

"Disposition to respond" is referred to as the desire or motivation to alter behavior or structure in accordance with the changes. The possession of the ability to recognize change and the engineering capacity to change is not sufficient to bring out a successful adaptation. The will and incentive of the civil service to change constitutes the third element of administrative adaptation. Officials must be motivated to alter their habit to adapt to the new rules and organizational structures. They can be motivated by internalization of the new values, material rewards, or punishment. Yet the task of increasing the motivation of the civil service to change could be difficult, given the conservative nature of the bureaucracy which is trained to

Table 1. Modes of Adaptation to Changes

		<i>Potential Disruption to Existing Operations</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Engineering Capacity	<i>Low</i>	Piecemeal Adjustment	Imitation
	<i>High</i>	Recombination	Prototyping

Source: Hood 1986.

follow complex sets of rules and procedures. The inert civil service may resist change as it would disturb their routine behaviour and operations. Vested interest is another obstacle to the introduction of change within the civil service. Civil servants may reject any change as it would reduce their power or responsibility and affect the prospects of their career. In short, the ability to recognize change, the capacity to respond, and the disposition to respond constitute the three essential elements of the adaptation of civil servants. The political adaptation of the Hong Kong civil servants is examined in this study according to this analytical framework and the following research design.

Research Design

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to obtain and compare data on the attitude of the senior civil servants towards political adaptation. Information was collected through (1) sending structured questionnaires to Administrative Officers and (2) discussing with Administrative Officers their attitude towards political changes during the transition to 1997. The study was carried out in four stages in 1993-1994. In stage one, in-depth interviews were conducted. Twenty-five Administrative Officers of different grades were selected for interview. The interviews were focused on the orientations of the civil servants towards the dynamic changes of the political system. The in-depth interviews could serve the following purposes: (1) to provide preliminary thoughts on the structured questionnaire and (2) to compare and to supplement the data obtained from the mailed survey.

In stage two, the questionnaire for the mailed survey was designed and tested. The framework of questions was drafted based on Hood's theoretical framework of adaptation. The answers from respondents in the in-depth

interviews served as important reference to moderate the questionnaire of the mailed survey. A subsequent step was to test the suitability of the questionnaire by sending the draft questionnaire to those interviewed in the in-depth interviews for trial and comments. The draft questionnaire was then revised and finalized.

In stage three, questionnaires with return envelopes were sent to all Administrative Officers. Arrangement was made with the Civil Service Branch for accessing to information of the Administrative Officers. There were 456 Administrative Officers of different grades as of July 1992. Details of the breakdown of the target population are in Table 2.

Table 2. Structure & Establishment of Administrative Officers*

<i>Administrative Officer</i>	<i>Grade Number of Officers</i>
Secretaries	13
Staff Grade A	15
Staff Grade B1	25
Staff Grade B	32
Staff Grade C	141
Senior Administrative Officers	88
Administrative Officers	142
Total	456

*Source: *Staff List 1992. Hong Kong Government. Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1992.*

In stage four, data were collected and analyzed. The analysis of the orientations of the Administrative Officers of Hong Kong government towards political changes would shed light on the prospect of the development of representative government and on the relationship between Hong Kong and China after 1997. Administrative Officers are the top officials of the Hong Kong government, occupying only 0.03 percent of the total size of the civil service. They are the policy makers of the government, making important decisions on the pace of democratization and the Hong Kong-China relationship. Their orientations towards political changes would affect the adaptation of the administration during the transition from a colony to a SAR.

Political Adaptation of the Civil Servants

Structured questionnaires were sent to 456 Administrative Officers of various grades in June 1993. As 52 Administrative Officers were on leave or overseas, the actual number of questionnaires sent was 402. A total of 142

responses was received with a response rate of 35 percent. As far as the sensitive nature of the questions and the tense Sino-British relations over Hong Kong are concerned, this rate of return can be regarded as reasonable and acceptable. Most of the respondents (78.5 percent) were above thirty years old: 34.1 percent came from the age group of 30-39; 34.8 percent came from the age group of 40-49 and 9.6 percent came from the age group of 50-59. Males occupied a significant proportion (70.2 percent) of the respondents. An absolute majority of the respondents (71.5 percent) were married with children. Another observation was that most of the respondents (68.2 percent) were Chinese in ethnic origin while the rest were Europeans and Indians. In summary, a majority of the respondents were Chinese, middle-aged, male and married. Thus this cohort of respondents was a group of experienced Administrative Officers whose ability to recognize change, capacity to change, and disposition to change will bear significant impacts on the adaptation of Hong Kong government. The orientations of the respondents towards change are analyzed below.

Capacity to Recognize Change

Since 1980 Hong Kong has been politicized by the question on the future of Hong Kong and on the development of representative government. Conflicting views are expressed about the pace of democratization and the contents of political reforms to be introduced in Hong Kong. The theme of representative government has been initiated by Hong Kong government since 1984 in the White Paper on *The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong*. Consequently, indirectly elected members from selected functional constituencies have been introduced into the Legislative Council which was a fully appointed body before 1985. Another dramatic development of representative government is the introduction of directly elected members into the Legislative Council in 1991 as an addition to the indirectly elected and appointed members. The constitutional package drafted by Governor Chris Patten in 1992 is another major step that changes the nature of the political system in Hong Kong. The package proposes to abolish all the appointed membership in the three-tier representative bodies, to expand the electoral franchise in functional constituencies by five hundred times, and to separate the membership and power of the Executive and Legislative Councils. As a result of these political changes, the Legislative Council, political parties, politicians, and the general citizens take up different roles and positions. How much the Administrative Officers have recognized these changes would illuminate the political adaptability of the civil service in the political transition.

An essential principle that regulates the relationship between the executive and the legislature in liberal democratic governments is that the

executive should be held accountable to the legislature and citizens. In other words, the executive officials have to follow the orders and are subject to the control of elected political masters. With respect to the changing relationship between the Hong Kong civil service and the elected Legislative Council, the Administrative Officers tend to recognize political accountability as the important principle practiced in Hong Kong government. For instance, 57.2 percent and 15.7 percent of the respondents respectively thought that Hong Kong government should be accountable to the Legislative Council to a "great extent" and "very great extent." Only 20.0 percent of the respondents answered "some extent," 5.7 percent thought "limited extent" and 0.7 percent said "very limited extent." The respondents were further asked to assess how much political accountability of Hong Kong government to the Legislative Council was practiced. According to the results, the Administrative Officers seem to recognize that political accountability is introduced and practiced in the government. For instance, 54.6 percent and 10.6 percent of the respondents, respectively, replied that Hong Kong government was accountable to the Legislative Council to a "great extent" and "very great extent." Only 28.4 percent and 5.0 percent of the respondents respectively admitted "some extent" and "limited extent."

The study shows that the changing status and influence of the Legislative Council are also recognized by the Administrative Officers. Most respondents noted that the influence of the Legislative Council increased after 18 directly elected members had joined the 60-member legislature since 1991. For instance, 38.6 percent, 18.6 percent, and 35.7 percent of the respondents respectively thought that the introduction of elected members into the Legislative Council increased the status of the legislature to a "great extent" "very great extent" and "some extent." Nevertheless, the Administrative Officers express reservation on the degree of representation of the Legislative Council. They noted the increasing status of the legislature, but they do not recognize the representativeness of the Legislative Council. In spite of the increasing influence of the legislature, only 5.6 percent of the respondents thought that the Legislative Council in the 1991-1995 session was "very representative" of the interests of Hong Kong people. Among the respondents, 58.5 percent and 31.7 percent respectively considered that the Legislative Council was "partly" and "not quite" representative. As such, the Legislative Council is considered by most Administrative Officers as not truly representative, and hence does not genuinely reflect public opinion. This finding implies that the Administrative Officers still regard themselves, rather than the Legislative Council, as the vanguard of public interest.

The study also found that the new value of public accountability to citizens is widely accepted by the Administrative Officers. For instance, 50.3 percent and 35.5 percent of the respondents respectively thought that Hong Kong government should be accountable to the general citizens to "great

extent" and "very great extent." Moreover, 44.0 percent and 18.4 percent of the respondents respectively believed that Hong Kong government was accountable to the general citizens to a "great extent" and "very great extent." These data suggest that the civil service has recognized the concept of public accountability and the changing relationship between government and citizens. Nevertheless, the Administrative Officers do not reckon that there is a widespread demand for democracy among the general public in Hong Kong. The study shows that only 4.3 percent and 25.0 percent of the respondents respectively thought that the general citizens were aspiring for a more democratic government to a "very great extent" and "great extent." In contrast, a significant proportion (52.9 percent) of the respondents thought that the general citizens were aspiring for a more democratic government only to "some extent." This conservative perception would certainly affect their perception towards the involvement of general citizens in the policymaking process.

With reference to the policymaking process, the emergence of political parties and elected politicians adds a new page to the politics in Hong Kong. They change and transform the model of consensual politics to adversarial and confrontational politics. Differences and opposition raised by political parties and politicians against the administration become the normal business of the day. The study shows that the Administrative Officers of Hong Kong government recognize the changing style of decisionmaking and they accept the existence of different views in the society. For instance, 44.0 percent and 36.2 percent of the respondents respectively thought that Hong Kong government respected and tolerated different opinions expressed by various political parties and politicians to a "great extent" and "very great extent." It seems that the top civil service has recognized the existence of divergent interests and the role of political parties and politicians in interest aggregation and articulation.

Aside from recognizing the involvement of political parties and politicians in the decisionmaking process, the Administrative Officers also recognize China as the newcomer to the political arena of Hong Kong. Although the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration has decided that Hong Kong would be a SAR with a high degree of autonomy, China is the future sovereign master of Hong Kong and would interpret what public policies and interests are conformable to the *Basic Law*. China has explicitly declared that any major policies going beyond 1997 should get the approval of the Chinese government. For instance, China has reiterated that the Legislative Council will be dissolved in 1997 and a provisional legislature will be established for the first SAR government. China further declared that contracts, leases and agreements unless signed and ratified by the Chinese side will be invalid after 1997. These two statements from China imply that any major policies on Hong Kong have to be endorsed by the Chinese government. As such, the

Administrative Officers will be accountable to the Chinese government which will then become the *de facto* ruler of Hong Kong before and after 1997. In fact, 39.1 percent, 21.1 percent, and 10.9 percent of the respondents respectively admitted that the authority of Hong Kong government has been damaged by China's involvements in Hong Kong's internal policy decisions. Perhaps China is the most difficult player among the political actors for the Administrative Officers to deal with as it is much more powerful than the other actors in terms of political, economic, and military resources. As the future sovereign power of Hong Kong, China acts as the overseeing power to prepare for the transfer of sovereignty and political power. The Preparatory Committee established by the Chinese National People's Congress has been working to devise a political blueprint and to locate the first Chief Executive of the SAR government. Recognizing the increasing importance of China, the Administrative Officers have held five meetings with the senior Beijing officials to exchange views and to establish a working relationship.

In conclusion, the study shows that the Administrative Officers have recognized the major changes and development in the political system during the transition. In order to adapt to the new political environment, the civil services are required to take certain actions to respond to these changes. The responses of the civil service to the changes could be reflected in the approach taken by the Administrative Officers. The success of political adaptation will partly depend on whether or not the civil service adopts an appropriate approach towards the changes.

Capacity to Respond

Recognizing these changes, the Administrative Officers make various adjustments for adaptation. With respect to the changes in the composition and the role of the Legislative Council, the Administrative Officers have oriented themselves to accept a more independent legislature. The study found that most of the Administrative Officers supported the reform to strengthen the independence of the Legislative Council by separating the membership of the Executive and Legislative Councils as proposed by Governor Patten in his 1992 constitutional package. For instance, 45.0 percent and 16.4 percent of the respondents respectively thought that the separation of executive and legislative branches of Hong Kong government was beneficial to a "great extent" and "very great extent." The Administrative Officers also perceived that the fully elected Legislative Council after 1997 would play a legitimizing role in the future political system. For instance, 34.5 percent, 20.2 percent, and 18.7 percent of the respondents respectively believed that the legitimacy of Hong Kong government would be enhanced by a fully elected Legislative Council after 1997 to "some extent," "great extent," and "very great extent" This implies that the Administrative Officers accept a

more independent and representative legislature in the decisionmaking system.

Nevertheless, the Administrative Officers express a high degree of reservation with respect to the changing role of the Legislative Council in the decisionmaking processes. For instance, only 2.1 percent and 29.8 percent of the respondents respectively thought that the Legislative Council should play a dominant role in the policymaking process to a "very great extent" and "great extent." In contrast, 44.0 percent and 19.9 percent of the respondents respectively thought the Legislative Council should only play a decision-making role to "some extent" and "a limited extent." In fact most (52.8 percent) admitted that the Legislative Council was only playing a policymaking role to "some extent" and 14.3 percent of the respondents even agreed that the Legislative Council was only playing a "limited role." These findings reflect that the Administrative Officers perceive the executive should continue to dominate the policymaking process. This perception is in line with the Administrative Officers' satisfaction with the current practice of limited accountability.

Given the existing limited political powers of citizens¹ and the restricted monitoring power of the Legislative Council,² the Administrative Officers tend to favor limited accountability. Most of the Administrative Officers in the in-depth interviews defined the meaning of political accountability as "creative dialogue among the administration, the Legislative Council, and the general citizens." Thus political accountability is meant by the Administrative Officers of Hong Kong government as to explain, to consult, and to seek advice rather than to follow the decisions of and to be controlled by the Legislative Council and the general citizens.

Similarly, the Administrative Officers are highly against the idea of getting endorsement from China before any policy is examined by the SAR Legislative Council. For instance, 65.4 percent and 16.2 percent of the respondents respectively disagreed "totally" and "partially" with the statement that "policies be endorsed by the Chinese government before being approved by the SAR Legislative Council." This suggests that the Administrative Officers do not want to give up their decisionmaking power to the Chinese government. They are willing to consult and to seek the advice of the Chinese government, but they are not prepared to be totally subordinate to the Chinese counterpart. Instead, the Administrative Officers favor maintaining a regular dialogue with the Chinese government. For instance, 58.2 percent and 29.9 percent of the respondents respectively agreed "totally" and "partially" that the SAR government should regularly report the progress of major policy decisions to the Chinese government. Furthermore, 41.0 percent and 38.1 percent of the respondents respectively agreed "totally" and "partially" that the SAR government should regularly explain its policy decisions to the Chinese government.

On the whole, the Administrative Officers are making piecemeal adjustments as a form of adaptation to the new political environment. Amid the political changes, the Administrative Officers want to keep the existing executive dominant relationship with the Legislative Council, and they prefer to maintain the same kind of trustee relationship with China as with Britain. The actions taken by the Administrative Officers are just piecemeal changes without altering the basic philosophy of an administrative state with the executive leading the Legislature, the citizens, and elected politicians. The administration would also like to treat China the same as Britain, seeking to maintain a *de facto* autonomy. These adaptative strategies do not involve a complete reengineering, copying of a new model, or recombining changes in every administrative aspect. Governor Patten's threat to veto a bill passed by the Legislative Council that is not regarded to be in the public interest (Patten 1995) is an indication that the administration is determined to keep the executive-led status quo.

Disposition to Change

As the Administrative Officers adopt a piecemeal approach in response to the changes during the political transition, the disposition to change could be reflected by the Administrative Officers' orientations towards government and politics. In liberal democratic states, the idea of popular sovereignty is generally accepted. Citizens are regarded as the masters of society who delegate their authority to elected politicians to govern. Government officials are accountable to the elected politicians who in turn are responsible to the general citizens. Thus, government officials are accountable to the general citizens through elected politicians. However in Hong Kong, the government is not elected by the general citizens but governed by the Administrative Officers. Thus, Administrative Officers are structurally not accountable to the general citizens.

In line with this structural relationship, the Administrative Officers express reservations towards the involvement of general citizens in making policies. For instance, a significant proportion (46.4 percent) of the respondents thought that Hong Kong government should involve the general citizens in the policymaking process only to "some extent." Only 3.6 percent of the respondents thought that Hong Kong Government should involve the general citizens in the policymaking processes to a "very great extent." This result was a sharp contrast with the previous finding that 35.5 percent of the respondents thought Hong Kong government should be accountable to the general citizens to a "very great extent." Furthermore, the Administrative Officers admitted that at present the general citizens were not very much involved in the policymaking process. For instance, only 22.7 percent of the respondents replied that Hong Kong government involved the general citizens

in the policymaking processes to a "great extent" while a significant number (50.4 percent) admitted that Hong Kong government involved the general citizens in the policymaking processes only to "some extent."

The orientations of the Administrative Officers towards the role of citizens in the decisionmaking processes can further be reflected in their perception of their relationship with the general citizens. An absolute majority (68.5 percent) of the respondents considered the citizens their "clients," while only 4.6 percent of the respondents considered the citizens their "masters." This shows that the Administrative Officers believe they must serve the citizens, but not necessarily do what the citizens say or want. Citizens are just treated as clients, rather than as masters of the society. Thus the Administrative Officers regard themselves as the producers to provide public goods to citizens rather than as the servants of citizens. The implication is that the Administrative Officers share the moral responsibility to govern in accordance with the public interest as far as possible, but they are the ones who determine what the public interest is. Though the Administrative Officers recognize public accountability, they still believe that the authority to govern should be in their hands. Thus, the administration does not want to introduce too many changes to allow more citizen participation.

In liberal democratic states, governments allow and tolerate different opinions expressed by various political parties and organizations since respect of differences is the foundation of liberal democracy. However, the study found that the Administrative Officers did not value very much the operation of party politics under the current system in Hong Kong. For instance, 20.9 percent and 48.2 percent of the respondents respectively agreed "totally" and "partially" with the statement that "party politics was detrimental to the efficient running of the government machinery in Hong Kong." This means that the Administrative Officers exhibit some reservations towards the emergence of political parties and political leaders, and their involvement in the decisionmaking process. Since the introduction of direct and indirect elections into the Legislative Council in 1985, political parties and leaders have dominated the legislature. Two-thirds of the members of the Legislative Council have affiliations with various political parties and organizations. Political parties such as the Democratic Party and leaders like Allen Lee of the Liberal Party have been active and critical in examining government policies. The decisions and proposals of the executive are very often challenged by these political parties and leaders. Thus, the Legislative Council is now full of debates and questions. As such, the Legislative Council is no longer as efficient and orderly as in the past. Moreover, policies and issues have been politicized by political parties and leaders, thus a political element in addition to technical considerations is brought into the decisionmaking process. These respective changes have presented a new environment for the Administrative Officers to operate. The findings of the study show that the Administrative

Officers do not favor the existing role of political parties and politicians in the governmental machinery. Though elections provide the legitimacy basis for political parties and leaders to examine government policies and to hold the government accountable, the Administrative Officers exhibit reservations towards the functioning and role of political parties and leaders. Resistance exists to competition for power from political parties among the Administrative Officers.

The practice of checks and balances between the executive and legislature has not been fully accepted by the Administrative Officers in Hong Kong. The study finds that the belief of the Administrative Officers in executive dominance has not been fundamentally shaken up by the changing political environment in Hong Kong. As such, the Administrative Officers do not expect a powerful legislature to check and balance the executive power. This mentality is reflected in the responses to the question "should senior civil servants of Hong Kong government continue to dominate the decisionmaking process after 1997?" Of the respondents, 42.9 percent and 13.0 percent respectively replied that senior civil servants should continue to dominate the decisionmaking processes to a "great extent" and "very great extent," though 32.6 percent of the respondents thought "some extent." This implies that the majority of Administrative Officers have not fully accepted the idea of becoming neutral administrators and of transferring the decisionmaking power to political parties and leaders, although they accept a more independent legislature and tolerate political opposition.

With regard to the motivation to maintain Hong Kong as a SAR with a high degree of autonomy, the study found that the Administrative Officers exhibited a strong will to achieve a highly autonomous government. For instance, 36.9 percent and 27.7 percent of the respondents respectively thought that Hong Kong civil servants would strive to maintain a high degree of autonomy with respect to China before and after 1997 to a "great extent" and "very great extent." The in-depth interviews indicated that what the Administrative Officers preferred about the relationship between Hong Kong and China after 1997 was to maintain the same kind of relationship as with the British government, that is, little Chinese intervention and a high degree of independence in internal affairs.

According to these findings, the disposition of the Administrative Officers to change is predominantly a conservative one, reflecting a bureaucratic and elitist mentality. The changing political environment does exert some degree of change in the political orientations of the Administrative Officers towards a more open and democratic type of administrative culture. For instance, the notion of political accountability has gained recognition among the Administrative Officers. Opposition and different opinions are also tolerated in the decisionmaking processes. Yet the changes in the administrative

structure of the Hong Kong civil service are limited to the extent that the ruling power and status of the executive are not seriously challenged and totally replaced. For instance, the Administrative Officers accept that the executive should be accountable to the legislature, but they do not think the Legislative Council should dominate the decisionmaking process. The Administrative Officers think they should act according to the best interest of citizens, but they do not want to involve citizen participation in the decisionmaking process to a great extent. The Administrative Officers tolerate and respect the opinion of political parties and leaders, but they do not favor the operation of party politics and distrust the politicians in the decisionmaking process. The Administrative Officers recognize the role of China in the political transition, yet they do not want to surrender their power to the Chinese officials. This kind of orientation towards change and political adaptation will elicit certain implications for the politics of transition in Hong Kong.

Implications

As the Administrative Officers occupy the central role in the government, the political adaptability of the senior civil servants to the changes in the political scene will shape the political development of Hong Kong. If the civil service under the leadership of the Administrative Officers is able to adapt to the new dynamic environment, the stability and prosperity of the society could certainly be enhanced. On the contrary, the administrative system will break down if the Administrative Officers fail to adjust themselves and to adopt appropriate strategies to deal with the challenges. According to the findings of this study, three observations which affect the political adaptability of the Administrative Officers could be noted. First, although the Administrative Officers recognize that the role of the Legislative Council and the political parties is increasing, they seem to underestimate the urge for democracy among the general citizenry. The study shows that the Administrative Officers do not perceive that there is a widespread public demand for democracy. Nevertheless, there are ample evidences that the public is in favor of a democratic system. For instance, the results of the 1991 and 1995 Legislative Council elections, the 1995 Municipal Council election, and the 1994 District Board election are consistent: the general citizens voted for the outspoken and hard-line democrats who won most of the seats in the three-tier representative system. Various opinion surveys also show that the democrats like Martin Lee and Emily Lau are the top popular Legislative Councilors (Chung 1994). Studies on political culture also indicate that the people of Hong Kong are developing towards a mature form of participatory political culture (Lam 1992; Lau and Kuan 1986). Thus, the perception of the Administrative Officers towards the public demand for democracy is not in line with the election results, opinion surveys, and academic studies. The failure

to recognize the accurate picture of the public demand for democracy could lead to frustration, hence loss of legitimacy of the government.

Another observation is the failure to formulate a comprehensive strategy other than piecemeal changes to handle the political changes. The piecemeal changes undertaken by the Administrative Officers seem to be superficial actions for expedient purposes. These actions do not respond closely to the actual changes and lack a long-term perspective. For instance, although the administration promises to be accountable to the Legislative Council, the administration is still free to decide whether it follows the suggestions made by the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Council on the ways to avoid wastage in resources. With respect to public access to information, the administration has not committed itself to allow the public to get access to government information and documents, although the Governor has reiterated that:

The Hong Kong government has a responsibility to account to the people of Hong Kong for the progress made in honouring its commitments ... and the public will have adequate information to judge the government's performance, the areas for improvement and the significance of any shortfalls or delays (Progress Report 1995).

Governor Patten refused to allow Legislator Christine Loh to initiate a bill on public access to information in May 1995, on the ground that it would have the effect of imposing a charge on the government revenue. Instead the administration issued an internal code of practice to handle the demands of the public for access to government information. As the Legislative Council, political parties, general citizenry, and China are becoming more assertive, the timid and piecemeal responses of the administration may not be able to satisfy the demands of the political actors in general and to create an acceptable political formula for allocation of values in particular.

The low capacity to respond is related to the lack of motivation of the Administrative Officers to adopt innovative approaches to cope with the changes. Perhaps this reflects the lack of morality within the civil service and the decreasing confidence towards the future after 1997. As the Administrative Officers have traditionally been regarded as the elite and vanguard of the society, they are not psychologically prepared to accept the challenges and criticisms brought about by the elected politicians and the public. The practice of requiring the Administrative Officers to defend and explain government policies in the Legislative Council and to the public is contradictory to their traditional norms in the civil service. The Administrative Officers are trained to be anonymous policymakers being accountable only to the Governor rather than to the elected politicians. Thus, the rise of elected politicians and the assertion of the Legislative Council as the representative of the people demoralize the Administrative Officers. The

uncertain career future after 1997 also negatively affects the motivation of the Administrative Officers. The fear of political purge initiated by the Communist regime on the mainland discourages the Administrative Officers from taking a bold move to invent new changes in the administration. The confidence crisis among the senior government officials due to the problem of insecurity raises the issues of early retirement and emigration of the senior officials. A study has shown that one-third of the Directorate Grade officers intend to leave the civil service after 1997, with another one-third undecided (Lee and Cheng 1994). The commitment and morality of the Administrative Officers are seriously doubtful, let alone their motivation to respond to change.

The consequence of such a pattern of political adaptability of the Administrative Officers could be detrimental to the continuity of stability and prosperity of Hong Kong during the political transition. This could lead to one of the crises which transitional societies always face. Binder (1971) suggests that political development of a transitional state may trigger off several crises: legitimacy, participation, and penetration. As the citizens, politicians, and Chinese officials are challenging the authority bases of the Administrative Officers, the administration is suffering a decline of legitimacy unless they could invent a set of rules to place themselves in a proper position vis-a-vis the other political actors. Hong Kong could encounter a participation crisis as there are too much public demands for political participation but with insufficient channels. Frustrations of the general citizens could lead to demonstrations, protests, strikes, and eventually chaos. Penetration crisis could also arise as a result of lack of government-citizen integration. If the Administrative Officers fail to adapt to the public aspirations, the general citizens will be alienated. As such, the government will be isolated from the public, followed by mutual miscommunication and mistrust.

Conclusion

The study finds that the Hong Kong senior civil servants exhibit a set of predominantly conservative norms of political adaptation. During the political transition to 1997, the Administrative Officers are encountering political changes with long-term implications. Democratization and the transfer of sovereignty constitute the two significant political challenges. The senior civil servants are slowly adapting to these political changes. The Administrative Officers recognize the increasing role of the Legislative Council, political parties, politicians, general citizens, and China in the decisionmaking process. Nevertheless, their responses are basically mere piecemeal adjustments than prototyping, imitation, or recombination.

The Administrative Officers basically prefer to maintain the status quo, that is, to keep the Legislative Council, political parties, politicians, general

citizens, and China in the periphery of the decisionmaking process while retaining themselves in the center. In view of the increasing demand for democracy and Chinese participation in the internal affairs of Hong Kong, these conservative orientations and responses will arouse confusions and uncertainties in the politics of Hong Kong. Consequently, a new set of administrative norms oriented towards a more open and democratic government has to be inculcated within the civil service in order to adapt to the changing political environment in Hong Kong. As one of the most dynamic transitional societies, Hong Kong's experience of political adaptation could certainly shed light on the adaptation of the bureaucracy of the Asian developing societies. As far as the Hong Kong experience is concerned, the Administrative Officers exhibit a conservative disposition to change and adopt a piecemeal approach in response to change. Perhaps it is important to cultivate a stronger and flexible disposition among government officials to respond, in order to make the administration sensitive and far-sighted. As the top decisionmakers of a society, senior government officials are capable not only of facilitating political development, but also of pushing forward initiatives in the direction that the political system is already evolving. Thus, a healthy growth of a political system depends on the motivation and determination of government officials to adapt to changes in transitional societies.

Endnotes

¹For instance, general citizens cannot elect a government on the basis of direct election and universal suffrage.

²For instance, the Legislative Council cannot increase the expenditure requested by the government in approving budget; it can only advise the government to avoid wastage in resources but cannot instruct officials to follow its suggestions; it cannot compel the executive to adopt a new policy proposed by an unofficial member because it will have the effect of imposing a charge on the government revenue.

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