

“Parallel Geographical-Party List” Electoral System by Mrs. Regina Ip

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Q1 What is the “parallel geographical-party list” (PGPL) electoral system?

A1 The PGPL system is a mixed electoral system that I proposed for the Hong Kong SAR in my master’s thesis recently written at Stanford University. Under PGPL, seats in LegCo would be divided into two categories: (1) seats for multi-member geographical constituencies; and (2) seats for political party lists. Correspondingly, each voter would be given two votes in a LegCo election — one cast for a candidate or a list of candidate standing in their own district-wide geographical constituency, the other for a party list standing in the Hong Kong-wide constituency. In both categories, the number of elected candidates from each party list would depend on the number of votes the list receives, in accordance with the current electoral rule of proportional representation (PR).

For example, if the number of seats in LegCo is expanded to 80, then a total of 40 seats may be set aside for various geographical constituencies and the remaining 40 for the Hong Kong-wide constituency. The electoral arrangement of the former category would be identical to existing geographical constituency elections of LegCo, while each political party could put forward no more than 40 candidates for inclusion in its own party list for the latter category. Every party list would then win LegCo seats in proportion to the number of votes cast for that particular list.

Q2 Why do you believe this system is appropriate for the Hong Kong SAR?

A2 I believe the PGPL system complies with all the underlying principles governing Hong Kong’s democratic development under the Basic Law: (1) development in light of actual situation; (2) gradual and orderly progress; (3) facilitation of a capitalist economy; and (4) balanced representation. In particular, this mixed system would meet the terms of the last two principles by facilitating the representation of interests across societal sectors. On the one hand, it would allow geographical constituency members of LegCo to focus on the local

interests of their respective districts. On the other hand, it would follow Hong Kong's fine tradition of elite participation in public service, enabling citizens whose experience and expertise transcend geographical constituencies to be returned to LegCo — provided that they are willing to stand for elections as candidates on a party list.

Q3 Is there any other country or territory that uses a mixed electoral system, under which two different groups of members are returned to the legislature?

A3 A mixed electoral system for national legislature is quite common. In fact, as of April 2006, a total of 30 countries and territories around the globe have adopted such an electoral arrangement. They include Germany, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and Russia.

In Japan, for instance, members of the Diet are returned either from the smaller, local constituencies or from the bigger, block districts. In an election for the House of Representatives, every voter has two votes — one cast for a candidate in his local constituency, the other for a political party, each of which has a list of candidates for each of the 11 block districts. The results of the 300 local constituencies are decided by plurality, whereas the 180 block seats are handed out to the parties in proportion to the number of votes they receive.

The PGPL system proposed herein is a variation of the electoral arrangement used in Japan and many other countries or territories. The increasing prevalence of a mixed electoral system manifests the worldwide recognition of the importance of balanced representation in the legislature.

Q4 You stated that you applaud Sir David Akers-Jones's effort to promote the establishment of a bicameral legislature, which would preserve functional constituencies in LegCo. On the other hand, you suggest that all LegCo members be elected by universal suffrage, a proposal that would eliminate functional constituencies. Aren't these two assertions contradictory?

A4 As I stated in my thesis, I do not espouse the proposal to create a second chamber in the legislature. Doing so would only unnecessarily lengthen the debate on various issues before LegCo and deepen potential schisms in society. Fundamentally, the Basic Law provides that all LegCo members be eventually returned by universal suffrage; this provision suggests that all functional

constituencies must ultimately be abolished.

It was my intention to applaud Sir David's attempt to formulate an electoral system that represents progress toward democratic development and observes the principle of balanced representation. However, preservation of functional constituencies in an upper house will not comply with the principle of universal suffrage. The proposal I put forward can resolve these problems.