

Extract of Mrs Regina Ip's thesis

Development of Political Talent

Closely related to the underdevelopment of political parties in Hong Kong is the shortage of political talent. As can be expected of a city which has thrived on its economic success, traditionally the brightest and best have flocked to business, industry and commerce and the more lucrative professions. At university level, majors in academic disciplines most directly conducive to a political career are not among the more popular choices for top university entrants. It is not surprising that Hong Kong's political parties are characterized by a lack of participation of elites with administrative and management experience, international perspectives, knowledge of economics and technology, the qualifications necessary for the successful management of a sophisticated, open, post-industrialist economy such as Hong Kong's.⁴² For Hong Kong's political parties to reach the stage of maturation whereby they would be ready and capable of forming and sustaining governments in office, it is estimated that several hundreds additional political talents with good university or advanced degrees, interest in public policy issues and

⁴² The newly established CP can lay claim to having some overseas educated professionals with advanced degrees among its founders. Yet most core leaders are from the legal professions and few have exposure to the West other than a short duration of study in United Kingdom.

(Editor's Note: This extract was provided by Mrs Ip as her response to the Consultation Document on Further Development of the Political Appointment System.)

equipped with some administrative and management experience would be required. The number is arrived at by adding up demand for political talents in the following categories of work:

Forming and sustaining governments in office: This involves filling the posts of the Chief Executive, the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the 11 minister-equivalent Principal Official posts. In the case of the posts of Chief Executive, Chief Secretary and Financial Secretary, incumbents would need support from their “private offices” or “cabinets” (easily 5 to 6 political staff in the case of the Chief Executive and another 2 to 3 in the case of the Chief Secretary or Financial Secretary). Existing “Secretaries” (minister-equivalent Principal Officials) are assisted by one Administrative Assistant, one Personal Secretary and one press officer who is required to provide support to the entire bureau (i.e. ministry). Secretaries can benefit from strengthening of their private offices. Already the Chief Executive Mr. Donald Tsang has indicated that Principal Officials need reinforcing at the political level by appointing more deputies (equivalent to junior ministers in a parliamentary system). If a political party or a coalition of political parties are to form and sustain governments in office, the new government would easily require an additional 33 political talents capable of functioning at ministerial level (serving as junior ministers and beefing up the currently politically under-established and over-stressed bureaus); and another 30 plus political talents to reinforce the offices of the Chief Executive, Chief Secretary, Financial Secretary and other Secretaries, all of whom should ideally be well-

educated men and women with interest and experience in public policy deliberation, and formulation of PR, media and political strategies.

Strengthening of support to Legislative Councilors: Legislative Councilors are paid an honorarium and an accountable allocation for their expenses in connection with the discharge of their duties, the amount of which is inadequate for the purpose of hiring well-qualified legislative and policy research assistants. Moreover, Legislative Councilors have no pension system, unlike their counterparts in Western democracies. The lack of reasonable remuneration, resource support for the proper discharge of their duties, and a pension system reduce the attractiveness of serving as Legislative Councilor as a career. Legislative Councilors could rely on research and legislative support from the central pool provided by the Secretariat for the Legislative Council, but the resources are equally limited. If the brightest and best are to be encouraged to serve as Legislative Councilors, better remuneration and a pension system would need to be introduced, better research and legislative support would need to be provided, and better qualified professionals and university graduates from a wide diversity of disciplines would need to be encouraged to serve as their staffers.

Reinforcement of elite participation in political parties: It would naturally be up to individual parties to determine their electoral platforms and strategies. But if any party is seriously interested in doing a good job in running Hong Kong on being elected into office, each and every party has a long way to go in beefing up elite participation in the work of their party.

Preservation of an Effective Bureaucracy

The prolonged economic decline of Hong Kong since the Asian financial crisis, the politicization of public policy debates and the outbreak of SARS have led the media and the public to exact from the civil service a level of accountability for whatever mishap, mismanagement or administrative oversight unmatched in established democracies in the West. Notwithstanding the crisis-ridden atmosphere during various periods since 1997 and political changes made at the top, the civil service has undeniably remained the cornerstone of stability in Hong Kong, steadfastly maintaining law and order and security and providing reliable and efficient services to the public. Although public accolades of good quality services rendered by public servants are few and far between, the standard of service provided by the Hong Kong civil service compares very favorably with that provided by their counterparts in Western democracies. The many examples of electoral democracies in turmoil in many parts of the world because of lack of security or poor administrative efficacy highlights the importance of ensuring a high-quality civil service and a good working relationship between the civil service and the political leadership after full-fledged representative democracy has been implemented in Hong Kong.

Moreover, in view of the shortage of political talents at this stage, it is envisaged that future Chief Executives will need to trawl candidates for filling minister-equivalent posts from the senior civil service for many years to come. For a full-fledged representative democracy to function effectively without undermining the administrative efficacy of the bureaucracy, it will be important to 1) clearly delineate the division of responsibilities between the political tier and the bureaucracy; 2) clearly explain to the senior bureaucracy any residual political role they may need to play in the transitional stage, pending the availability of sufficient political talents to fill all posts open to political appointment, and enlist their support for the transition; 3) provide the

bureaucracy with protection against arbitrary political interference with the professional conduct of their duties by establishing independent structures for handling of complaints about undue interference or unfair performance appraisals ; and 4) remove outdated constraints on civil servants' participation in political activities. For example, civil servants should be told in no uncertain terms that they have the right to take part in political activities and express their political preferences in the same way as ordinary citizens, provided that they refrain from doing so during office hours. A rule should be introduced, similar to that in the U.S., requiring that civil servants should not be allowed to make political donations. The new paradigm should seek to combine greater political legitimacy with administrative effectiveness, building on the experience and professional competences of the civil service and introducing policies, procedures and structures that facilitate co-operation between the political leadership and the civil service.