

Patron—Client Politics and Elections in Hong Kong

Bruce Kam-kwan Kwong



Routledge Contemporary China Series

Patron–Client Politics and Elections in Hong Kong

The study of patron–client politics is new to the study of Hong Kong political science. This book examines whether patron–client relations are critical to the electoral victory of candidates; how the political elites cultivate support from clients in order to obtain more votes during local elections; and tests the extent to which patron–client relations are crucial in order for candidates to obtain more ballots during elections.

Covering patron–client politics and public administration in Hong Kong; the electoral dynamics including the Chief Executive election and the Legislative Council and District Councils elections; the co-optation of key elites by using patron–client mechanisms; the study of the committees and elites who have been politically co-opted; the appointment mechanisms that have played a crucial role in patron–clientelism; and finally the China factor in the entire processes and politics of patron–client politics.

Bruce Kwong finds that the better candidates cultivate patron–client relations, the greater their chance of winning the election; and the smaller the size of the electoral constituency, the greater the impact of patron–client relations. Finally, the book stresses the role of Beijing as a powerful patron shaping the Hong Kong Chief Executive and the latter's clients and analyzes the political implications and long-term consequences of patron–client politics in Hong Kong.

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Preface

This book proves that patron–client relations are indispensable to all levels of Hong Kong’s elections, including the elections held for the Chief Executive, Legislative Council, District Councils, grassroots-level institutions such as the Mutual Aids Committees (MACs), the Heung Yee Kuk (HYK) and pro-Beijing district groups. Patron–client relations have varying degrees of significance in these four levels of elections. The patron–client network plays a critical role in election of the Chief Executive. However, patron–client relations tend to assume a lesser importance in the Legislative Council’s (LegCo) direct elections because of the larger geographical constituencies, although *ren-ch’ing* and *guanxi* are still crucial in the candidates’ campaigns for functional constituency elections as it will be more easy to cultivate votes through these relationships in such small circle elections.

At the grassroots level, clientelism is crucial for political party members to penetrate housing groups, such as MACs and Owners Corporations (OCs). Due to the fact that the geographical constituencies in District Council elections are smaller than LegCo’s direct elections, patron–client politics tend to be a decisive factor shaping candidates’ chances of electoral victory at the district level. Though the 2003 District Council elections saw a decline in the impact of patron–client relations, patronage politics still persist in MACs, HYK and pro-Beijing group mobilization of voter registration for the 2004 LegCo direct elections.

In short, patron–client relations are particularly prominent in the Chief Executive election and LegCo’s functional constituency elections at the elitist level, and District Council elections, rural elections and party infiltration into housing organizations at the grassroots level as well.

Bruce Kwong
2009

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I am thankful to my respected mentors in academia for providing insightful comments from different point of views that have helped me to refine my chapters. Special thanks are due to Sonny Lo (University of Waterloo) who assisted me in constructing this pioneer topic in Hong Kong politics and who has given me critical advice and comments whenever needed, and Ming Chan (Stanford University) who commented on the role of Tung's super patron (Beijing) in Chief Executive election; Ian Thynne (Charles Darwin University) and John Burns (University of Hong Kong) who discussed the major theme of the topic; Joseph Chan and Peter Cheung (University of Hong Kong) who helped enrich the contents of the theoretical framework; and Chang Chak-yan (Chinese University of Hong Kong) who commented on *guanxi* politics in South East Asian countries. I am indeed very grateful for their help.

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Abbreviations

ADPL	Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood
AO	Administrative Officers
BRFC	Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre
CP	Citizens Party
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CE	Chief Executive
CF	Civil Force
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
DAB	Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong
DC	District Council
DP	Democratic Party
EAC	Electoral Affairs Commission
EC	Election Committee
ExCo	Executive Council
FTU	Federation of Trade Unions
GBM	Grand Bauhinia Medal
HKAPDM	Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China
HKPA	Hong Kong Progressive Alliance
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administration Region
HYK	Heung Yee Kuk
ICAC	Independent Commission Against Corruption
LegCo	Legislative Council
LP	Liberal Party
MAC	Mutual Aid Committee
NPC	National People's Congress
OC	Owners Corporation
PC	Preparatory Committee
PRC	People's Republic of China

1 Introduction

The Report of the University of Hong Kong Independent Investigation Panel has made some remarks [on the intervention of academic freedom] about Mr Andrew Lo's evidence ... I have known Mr Lo for many, many years, and he is an honest and reliable man.

Tung Chee-hwa

Former Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Political science research in Hong Kong covers a whole range of topics. Local political scientists and sociologists focus on topics such as the Legislative Council, electoral systems, political culture and voting behaviour, as well as competitive political party systems.¹ In fact, Hong Kong has debated democratization since the British Hong Kong Government introduced representative government in the early 1980s. Since 1993, several political changes have caught the attention of political scientists as well as the people of Hong Kong. These changes included former Governor Mr Christopher Patten's political reforms, the implementation of Hong Kong Basic Law, and the frequent elections held for the Legislative Council (LegCo), the Urban and Regional Councils, and the District Councils (formerly Boards). In general, political science research tends to focus on macro-level political phenomena, such as institutional change and political party systems in transition.

The study of local politics and political party operations at the grassroots level, however, has been relatively sparse. The interactive personal relationship between citizens and political elites has received little attention as well. This phenomenon existed not only in the colonial era, but persists in the post-colonial Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Sophisticated personal relationships are crucial for political elites to maintain the trust, loyalty, emotional support and affection of Chinese citizens. The importance of these relationships is demonstrated by the legacy of Chinese personal relationships and affection.²