

 Read Message

  Back to: Inbox

From:
 Date:2005/04/19 Tue AM 11:16:55 CST
 To:<views@cab-review.gov.hk>
 CC:

Subject:Hong Kong is Ready

    Move To:

To the Secretariat of the Constitutional Development Task Force:

My name is David Wong, a long-time resident of Hong Kong. I also hold a degree in Political Science from Yale University, where I graduated with distinction in my major in 1995. I won a senior essay prize for having written the best senior essay in comparative politics, which was, incidentally, entitled: "On Dangerous Ground: Bureaucratic Deviance in Hong Kong after 1997." After I did graduate work in the same subject at Stanford, I worked in two investment banks in their equities department prior to starting a business two years ago called Mobile Adventures, which is dedicated to bringing Hong Kong's rich, unique heritage to visitors using wireless technology.

I highlight my academic background because, in comparative politics, one of the main areas of study is what brings about democracy: where does the demand for it come from? By far, the most convincing theorists (Dahl, Diamond) of the last fifty years have been followers of the so-called "modernization" school. Their hypothesis, proven by economic statistics, show an incredibly high correlation between economic development and political liberalization, or democracy. In other words, the higher the economic level of development achieved, the more likely the state is to be a democracy. Furthermore, statistics have shown that the greater the level of economic development, the greater the level of expressed need by citizens for democracy.

Now quite often democratic transitions can be difficult, and they do not always take hold. But again, there is a very high correlation between success and national income. In fact, well-known political science writer and Newsweek editor Fareed Zakaria noted that once a country's GDP exceeds a certain level, (usually between US\$7,500-US\$10,000 per capita), it is virtually certain that democracy will take hold and succeed. It makes intuitive sense, after all, that the wealthier a country, the more complex the decision-making process of government becomes, and the more the needs of various stakeholders and constituents of a society must be expressed through democratic means. The only exception to the per capita GDP rule are countries that are dependent on natural resources for their income (i.e. oil producing states). So open pluralistic societies like Hong Kong that have no natural resources are not party to this exception.

A last corollary of modernization theory I will share with you is that if the needs for democracy are not met in complex economies with a large middle class, the legitimacy of a given government will be limited, and any government will find such conditions increasingly difficult environments in which to function.

The case of Hong Kong is why I felt compelled to write you this letter. A great deal has been said about Hong Kong is 'ready' or not for democracy and direct elections of the legislature and Chief Executive. But by any measure of GDP, Hong Kong is the most developed territory in the world that is not governed as a direct democracy. Its citizens are clearly cosmopolitan people, exposed to ideas from all over the world, and are responsible for making a huge number of complex decisions on a daily basis. Past elections have been well attended, and have all gone off extremely peacefully. Hong Kong's citizens, from a civic perspective are some of the most urbane and mature people on the planet. The trouble clearly is this - its democratic development is not being determined by its own potential (read GDP) but rather by the needs

and the level of development of its motherland, China, which has some ways to go before being considered 'economically' ready for democracy.

I submit to you then, that the debate should not be about whether Hong Kong is ready for democracy - it most certainly is - but rather how its clear need for democracy can be managed and pushed forward without upsetting issues of legitimacy on the mainland. I think the people of Hong Kong would be far better served if you take that concept as the starting point for any review of constitutional development. It would also be much better if Hong Kong's citizens were treated like responsible adults that were capable of exercising good judgment at the ballot box, instead of being spoken down to like irresponsible children. The government must engage and include citizens on this basis and make the society cognizant that this is the challenge facing democratic development in Hong Kong, and must also be seen to be more active in forcing change. Do not forget, if people do not get what they want in a society as complex and as economically developed in Hong Kong, the legitimacy failure and subsequent policy gridlock experienced by the Tung Chee-Hwa administration could just as quickly return under Donald Tsang. Democracy may not be a panacea for all ills, but it may be the only way to govern a polity like Hong Kong.

Sincerely,

David Wong

---PLEASE NOTE MY NEW ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBERS, EFFECTIVE MARCH 1, 2005---

[Reply](#) [Reply All](#) [Forward](#) [Delete](#) Move To:

[Search Messages](#)

[Previous](#) [Next](#) Back to: [Inbox](#)

[Help](#)