

ENGAGEMENTS BEYOND ELECTIONS

IN SINGAPORE, HONG KONG, TAIWAN, AND SOUTH KOREA

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“Public” participation in “the state” is an old topic of political study, and new forms of state-society engagement beyond elections call for novel thinking about it. Small rich Asian countries on China’s periphery provide empirical information that can enrich theory about modern political participation. This essay explores developments in Asia’s “little dragons,” comparing cases when governments and publics have engaged each other or have avoided doing so. Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea – despite their differences – are all economically wealthy and socially diversified. Each has both an official polity (government) and a civil polity (often vaguely dubbed ‘civil society,’ although in such discourse the meaning of ‘civil society’ is wholly political, not vaguely social). The official and civic sectors in each of the dragons sometimes conflict and can benefit by bridging “state-society” gaps.

The notion that the public can participate in making policy is democratic in origin. It is also naturalistic, because unofficial citizens are so many they may have collective influence. But this notion has not been an eternal norm in any region of the world, nor has it been monotonically supported by everybody anywhere. Modern governments by, of, and for “the people” are nonetheless supposed to pay attention to the values and interests of citizens who are not officials.

The topic of civic engagement implies that the state and the public are different from each other but can cooperate for the good of each side. This view arises not only because governments coordinate social benefits, but also because they are scary. States claim monopolies of coercion. They may arrange social fairness or threaten social unfairness. So it is useful to bring findings (as well as theory) from comparative politics and sociology into a discussion of public engagement in governance. States are bureaucracies that, as Max Weber wrote, have great power because they are immortal, specialize in offices that allocate resources in expert roles, use clear documentary directives, and limit risks to their own organizations (Bendix 1962). Sociologists are seldom poets, but Weber became lyrical about the dangers of “legal-rational” bureaucratic power: “Not summer’s bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness” (Weber 1919, 128). He hoped creative state and non-state leaders, when they recognize and understand each other, could improve this bleak future.

Elections are one method for taming governmental elites, but voting is usually concurrent with other methods. Ballots have varying importance in the four “little dragons.” All use elections, albeit with differing franchises – and none uses electoral engagement only. Elections are often misconceived as the essence of democracy, but the practical meaning of voting varies sharply among places. The election of Singapore’s Prime Minister occurs in a system that responds assiduously to popular sentiment but has for decades been dominated by the People’s Action Party (PAP) (Woo 2019). The Hong Kong Chief Executive is chosen by a committee largely composed of businesspeople whose firms depend on good relations with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nominating and voting in Taiwan (Liu 2019) and South Korea (Lah 2019) follow electoral methods used in other high-income societies, but parties in both places are usually more disciplined

than is common in the West. The leaders of Korea's parties are stronger in nomination processes than those on Taiwan (Mobrand 2014). The four "dragons" also use non-electoral means to aggregate existential-identity values, as well as tradable-bargainable interests, of state and citizens.

A Paradigm to Improve Government-with-Public Engagements about Values and Interests

When do regimes and unofficial communities attempt or prevent engagements with each other? Evidence from Hong Kong suggests they do so when the official elite's core values are not endangered by the opposition's, when the opposition's are not violated by the government, when resources are available to support the public's likely demands from participation, and when the regime's and the opposition's constitutional/organizational structures are legitimately defined so that recognized leaders on each side can negotiate with each other (adapted from Cheung 2019).

This paradigm could predict when participations occur; these four variables are enough for that purpose: whether the state elite tolerates the values of active non-state elites, whether unofficial leaders and their followers reciprocate, whether the resources and concrete interests for agreement are available, and whether the state and civic groups' leaderships are sufficiently coherent to allow consultation. Often fewer than four determine actual outcomes. For example in Hong Kong now, most of these conditions are too weak to resolve current contentions; so public participation there is halting at best, violent at worst. Some resources are available, but heavily armed police use weapons against protesters, who respond in kind. Unclear ideologies and distrust among leaders make negotiation practically impossible and thus make civic initiatives incoherent (cf. Piven and Cloward 1979, or Zhou 1996). In Singapore, most of the conditions are adequately met; so politics there is calmer. In South Korea and Taiwan, keenly perceived external threats improve chances that most of these variables can usually allow engagements. Many published essays on state-public mutual participations or non-participations start with "a bewildering array of typologies" – only some of which end up as necessary for their arguments (Farid and Li 2019, 4). Reduction of the conditions for engagements is an improvement of the "Occam's razor" sort.

And these four factors can be further reduced to two, when they are shown as quadrants on an array generated by two axes, values-or-interests and society-groups-state. This display can be as effectively presented in words as it could in a graph. A horizontal line would represent group sizes, ranging from individuals to "social" medial clusters to the larger polity, the state. A vertical axis can be the classic distinction between values and interests (e.g. Bendix 1962, 286-303). The four quadrants can be described in cartographic form. On the 'northeast' would be old traditions (whole-polity values, which are long-lasting); on the SE, pluralized diversity (as whole states develop varied interests over modern decades); on the SW, equity interests (assets and political benefits that specific groups or individuals hold over shorter terms); and on the NW, groups' values (either constitutional ideals or violence that implement elites' or citizens' core commitments). These are four baskets of motives for, or against, engaging in official and civil politics. They are not strictly hermetic categories; but similar logics of action have been used by many well-known social scientists (who are listed with details in White 1998, 58-67). Factors for or against public participation can be analyzed by whether they arise among individuals/groups or in whole states, and by whether they start in values or interests.

What is the use of such a classification? First, it is circumspect, demanding attention to both state and non-state actors' behavior for or against mutual participation. Focusing on either officials or unofficials alone (as those groups tend to do!) would be insufficient. Instead, asking questions about both sides, especially whether motives that prevent engagements can be reduced, lessens impulses to violence from either. Any polity comes in multiple sizes, which are not 'levels' because there is no presumption, prior to evidence, which grouping is strong or weak. Second, this scheme distinguishes demands for engagement into the two main kinds: relatively changeable interests that are often liable to negotiation, and existential values that present state and social leaders with problems that are hard or impossible to solve in short periods of time.

1. Whole-Polity Factors for or against Values Engagements

Old political traditions in Singapore or Hong Kong come in conflicting forms. "British" norms that allow considerable social freedom vie with family-collectivist "Asian" models that conceive the government as a loving parent and the people as happy children. One reason for the success of the PAP's main founder, Lee Kuan Yew, is that he combined abilities as a British lawyer with paternalistic sermonizing as "Minister Mentor," his last official title. Either set of customs can be presented as natural and rightful. These traditions are old, albeit not as eternal as their advocates suggest. They are means to explain actions that also often have additional motives.

The external context of a whole polity can affect its long-term values. This is particularly evident, and politically potent, in Singapore. Its Future Economy Council identifies international trade sectors that pay well – "flying geese" is a common East Asian term. They grow with support from a "developmental state" (Johnson 1982, Cumings 1999). Johnson's book, seminal in this field, argues that Japan's model developmental state did not start as a philosophical concept of governance. Instead, it grew as a national tradition, which for more than half a century shaped Japan's approach to the world. It was also based in a "sense of crisis," including Japanese observations of what Western powers had done to China. Singapore's self-discipline and developmental state can likewise be traced to its specific history. This includes many periods of violent conflict: against British colonization, against Japan's Kempeitai military police in a city renamed 'Syonan,' then a jungle guerrilla war led by Chinese throughout the Malay peninsula against Japan and later against Britain. In the "Maria Hertogh riots" of 1950, Muslims burned buildings and killed people in Singapore. The early 1960s saw exceptionally bitter political feuds between Lee Kuan Yew's PAP and the quasi-communist Barisan Socialis. Singapore was kicked out of Malaysia in 1965 (Lee might otherwise have become Prime Minister of that country; Turnbull 1989). Singapore is an island of less than 6 million, three-quarters ethnic Chinese, in a Malay-Muslim sea of about 270 million. Anti-Chinese riots at Kuala Lumpur in 1969, and in Indonesian cities at recurring times before and after that date, make Singaporeans think about their external context. If all Indonesian Chinese boarded boats to Singapore because of pogroms, they would double the city's population immediately. The city's context and history explain its discipline. Free speech in Singapore, if it led to "racial" mobilizations between Chinese and Muslims, would be a mortal danger to the state. The PAP, preventing such peril, has become the most expert Leninist party anywhere. In comparison, all others are rank amateurs.

Much of Hong Kong politics can also be described in terms of tensions between British and Chinese political legacies (White 2016, 53-110). Neither of these traditions is entirely self-consistent. They can frame ideas about fairness or order, even when they do not produce either. Practically all Hong Kong people are ethnic and cultural Chinese, but many were content with the government that existed by 1997, the end of the British era. Especially as social roles diversified because of economic changes that continued later, Hong Kong's "ethos" of values evolved. Now many citizens crucially value freedoms of speech and assembly (Lau 1988 vs. Pepper 2007, or almost any recent HK news item). Many in Hong Kong march for more democracy; the CCP wants less. A satirist once groaned that Hong Kongers' hopes were summed up in a sentence: "Let's all shut up and make money!" (Feign 1997). Few think that joke describes Hong Kong now.

Bureaucrats increasingly replace tycoons as the leaders of Hong Kong's polity. A study of 476 engagement exercises that were reported between mid-1997 and 2018 shows that three-fifths turn out merely to be occasions when the government just claimed it had listened to public views (Cheung 2019). Few if any such events created policies that the state bureaucracy had not wanted anyway. Consultative government was a shibboleth, but few sure examples of it have been found.

On Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek ruled for decades as an autocrat, sometimes claiming to be an eventual democrat. He was "elected" by the Kuomintang (KMT) that he controlled. The politics of the island is still shaped by tensions between paternalistic traditions and participatory norms, but both self-identifying Chinese "blue" and Taiwanese "green" voters now value extensive freedom. The uncertain American protector, far away across the Pacific Ocean, also claims to be democratic, although "the people" have never been more than semi-sovereign anywhere (Schattschneider 1975). Many of the islanders do not want to be forced to identify as Taiwanese or Chinese, rather than both. Frequent voting for local as well as island-wide offices has created a tradition of watching the lively spectacle of electoral campaigns. This made the democracy strong (Rigger 1999). Many Taiwan youths now seek more means of engagement on diverse issues than a procrustean stress just on the green-or-blue difference would allow (Liu 2019).

In South Korea, it has become traditional for most voters south of Seoul, in a corridor down to southeast Busan, to cast their ballots for rightist parties – while those especially in the southwest Jeolla region tend to be more leftist. This pattern has been remarkably stable over many years. Half the country's people live in the capital region, Seoul, which is politically diverse. Democratic norms have recently become strong in the state, despite severe hierarchy in most unofficial polities such as churches and corporations. Traditions of violence in Korean politics are under-reported. After Syngman Rhee won the presidency in 1948, he had a lieutenant execute his only serious opponent Kim Koo, who had personally killed at least two men (Jager 2013, 48, 496). Rhee won again in 1956, and the runner up Cho Bong-am was then accused of being a North Korean spy – and was executed by 1959 (Breen 1999, 201). Rhee reportedly said: "I shall take over the society and run it on a purely democratic basis. I shall appoint all the other officials" (Allen 1960, 237). The assassination in 1979 of General/President Park Chung-hee by his own intelligence chief is well-known. (Murders among elites in North Korea have also been several and recent.) Historically and geographically, Korea is caught between larger countries. Often China or Japan patronized Korea's king – who, when the foreign protector demanded too much, could switch to

that external country's main external rival - and simultaneously purge the court, killing some and scaring others. Korea's dictators, traditionally fighting foreign dependence, have been violent domestically (Ledyard 1983, White 2018a). Now, however, South Koreans are creatively finding new ways to start their politics moving beyond elections while being reasonably fair (Lah 2019).

2. Whole-Polity Factors for or against Interests Engagements

Modern change pluralizes short-term political and economic interests. Elections and other civic participations support regimes that aggregate tradeable benefits, not just traditional or existential identity values. Many researchers, for at least seven decades now, have noticed that relatively rich societies per capita, which have been made so by efficient markets, typically tend to use liberal institutions to mediate the diverse interests thus created. Countries that are most "developed" in economic, educational, and medical terms behave as liberal democracies (Lipset 1961, UNDP any year since 1960). In some nations, admittedly, populist leaders who discourage engagement with functional sectors, notably media, are now top leaders (China, the U.S., Venezuela, Turkey, Egypt, Russia, India, and others are arguable examples). But nations that are prosperous-per-person still tend to tolerate more public participations do than others. Corporatist or syndicalist institutions have become partial substitutes for elections in some polities, but they do not work well for all modern problems or forever (Schmitter 1974).

All four "little dragons" are rich. A careful ranking of polities by "human development" shows that *all* of the top 34 (except Hong Kong and Singapore!) are unapologetic liberal democracies (UNDP 2020). This index collates measures of wealth, health, and education – but not politics. So its correlation with regime type tells much about behavioral links between societies and states. Taiwan would qualify among the top lot too, if the UNDP counted it.

Recent political engagements in Singapore have emerged from a post-2008 "sense of crisis" because of economic disruptions and consequent PAP fears of loss in elections (Woo 2019). At first, this anxiety may seem paranoid. PAP concern peaked in 2011, when it received 61 percent of all votes. In most electoral systems, that would be deemed a landslide. The PAP considered it a failure – and responded smartly, with popular policies to meet families' interests in housing, transport, immigration, social security, and jobs (Calder 2016). Some official paranoia and illiberalism in Singapore might be justified by the island's ethnic and geographical context. Free flows of information may be the best single marker of political modernization (Teorell 2010), but the PAP tends to distrust expressions of ideas that do not support the economy (Rodan 1998).

Hong Kong is also an outlier, because it is wealthy-per-person but has a government that in practice discourages potential engagements, which well up increasingly because the city's socioeconomic structure has modernized. Carles Boix (2003) suggests that the main deterrent to democratic engagement in any country is rich elites' dislike of imposts of any sort, notably taxes. This finding applies strongly to Hong Kong. And most of the public's unavoidable imposts in that low-tax polity are not official. They are not taxes, going through any official treasury, but instead are organized in a polity that gives the richest families unparalleled freedom to reap local wealth.

In Hong Kong, public participation (especially if it ever affects policy) seldom occurs when it might threaten the resources of rich corporate families to whom local laws give special powers

in the executive and legislature. This is a matter of money and interests; it is not about expressions of any traditional identity. Conflict about it is an effect of irreversible development on long-term specialization of interests. Although worker/capital, left/right politics has not developed in ideologically capitalist and anti-leftist Hong Kong, protest movements led by students have recently increased — and Chinese norms give a special role to intellectuals, even young ones.

Duopolies run crucial sectors in the city, as readers of this essay who have lived there will know. Dairy Farm Holdings owns and runs Wellcome groceries and Mannings drug stores, Maxim's restaurants, and a 7-Eleven network. This combine may easily collaborate to fix prices with shoppers' main alternative: the Watson Group's "ParknShop" for drugs and food, which is linked to the Hutchison-Whampoa/Li Ka-shing conglomerate (that is also in shipping, docks, and real estate; Robertson 2014). The Heritage Foundation (2019) gives Hong Kong the global top score among 180 polities for "economic freedom." Singapore ranks second. Low taxes may liberate the rich, but this "freedom" index ignores oligopolies that confine and charge the poor. Hong Kong prices and rents are high. Tycoons' decisions in Hong Kong's Legislative Council can and do veto tax or government spending increases. This pattern has begun to end as the CCP finds that its reliance on tycoons hurts Beijing's interests – and as Hong Kong's richest families sense, at least in private, that they have been too greedy for their own good.

So the tycoonocracy may have run most of its course in Hong Kong. Several property magnates, including Li Ka-shing, did not attend 2019 National Day festivities in Beijing. Divisions among Beijing's other proxies have also begun to appear. Land is scarce, and the conservative pro-Beijing Heung Yee Kuk (Rural Council) of the New Territories derides 'socialist' proposals by the pro-Beijing would-be-proletarian DAB party (the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of HK) to use eminent domain to build public residential housing on land for which the current rural owners could then no longer charge rent. Some DAB members have turned down invitations to meet CE Carrie Lam, fearing election losses if they are too often seen in public with her. The CCP now relies decreasingly on tycoons or pro-Beijing parties. It depends increasingly on the bureaucracy of civil servants, especially police, which is supposed to be led by the CE (but in effect by the CCP United Front Work cadres). Lam and her ministers present themselves as wooden technocrats (see Lam 2019). They are modern, but they lack charisma or responsiveness as politicians. Beijing's elite is similar, but it persuades mainland 'patriots' to think that only the CCP can 'save' China. Nationalism delays public boredom with bureaucrats as leaders.

Taiwan's modernization also accelerated under a dictatorship (Chiang Kai-shek's), but its polity changed greatly in the following three decades. The island had spectacular economic development from the 1950s until the 1973 oil crisis, and growth later reignited at almost the same pace. This experience spawned diverse interests that do not correlate with the "green" (independence-tending) or "blue" (mainland-tending) political disagreement. The early-1950s land reforms took acreage from Taiwanese landlords who got stock shares of companies that Chiang's government inherited from the former Japanese colonial regime. The KMT state, run by a mainlander minority, needed support from more people on the island. Land went first to poor Taiwanese and Hakkas, and its possession became for many a determinant of family wealth.

Fast growth and employment, especially in SMEs, generated money for middle-low income groups in Taiwan's suburban and rural areas (as later occurred in China, White 2018b), spreading wealth to all but the poorest. Self-identifying Taiwanese, about six of every seven islanders, could get power under Chiang's mainlander autocracy – but only in economic networks, not yet in government, the military, or higher education. Many entrepreneurs could fulfill a dream of becoming their own bosses, especially after the passage of mid-1950s industrial laws (Shieh 1993). Most new enterprises were small, e.g., motorcycle repair shops or food stalls; but a few developed further, occasionally into major companies in high-tech fields such as computers. This prosperity, created by local bosses, pluralized interests on the island – as occurred under similar rural and suburban entrepreneurs on the mainland throughout the 1970s and 1980s, despite the CCP there. Below the whole-polity zoom size, Taiwan's politics are less totally different from the mainland's than the governments of either side have interests admitting.

South Korea's fast economic growth has also produced multiple political cleavages, especially between unions and *chaebol* corporations. Comparative politics theorists have suggested that tensions between capital and labor are the main drivers of democratic engagement in most modern nations (Rueschmeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 2001). In South Korea, as in Chile and other new democracies that emerged from military dictatorships, tensions between capital and labor have been particularly sharp (Alemán 2010). Four-fifths of the South Korean people say that money corruption is endemic in both government and businesses (Lah 2019). Confidence in officials is low – but local institutions and families are more trusted. Conflict between capitalists and workers remains intense in Korea, and it has been mediated by cohesive associations. Participation in parties, which are non-government organizations, may be as important politically as is engagement with the government as such (Mobrand 2019). Presidents Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun, and now Moon Jae-in have supported many public participations that emerged from South Korea's now-prosperous and diverse economic structure. Korea has for centuries arguably been even more hierarchic, especially in the state, than the other places considered here. Economic change, resourcing other institutions, now slightly varies this design.

3. Group/Individual Factors for or against Interests Engagements

The parts of a large polity want satisfaction of their interests, whether or not that comes from government. A motive for popular engagement is mass grassroots liking for social support, whether official or not. Governments are not the sole agents or targets of participation; unofficial groups are fully political too. For example, Singapore's PAP is ideologically anti-socialist and pro-market – but also communalistic, to keep the Chinese/Malay/Tamil/English-speaking polity together, even though “racial” distinctions in that society are obvious. Singapore lacks much social safety net for poor people, lest they not work hard enough to support themselves. But it has a Central Provident Fund, into which all workers make substantial mandatory contributions, in effect buying mutual fund shares that they own – and may exhaust – for housing, medicine, or pensions. The government builds flats and backs mortgages, but citizens own their homes (Chua 1997).

This city-state's taxes are low, and its policies attract high-asset immigrants. Its Future Economy Council, now chaired by heir-apparent Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat (and before him by current P.M. Lee Hsien Loong) aims to delay inequity problems by “expanding the pie.” It

enlarges the tax base by promoting profitable “flying goose” sectors. In Singapore, as in Hong Kong, manufacturing has scant land on which to build; so the economies of both cities are now largely in financial services, and in education to support them. Money for the banking and real estate sectors has come to Singapore from ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs throughout Southeast Asia. To Hong Kong, it has come (sometimes for ‘laundering’) largely from mainland China.

The wealth of Hong Kong billionaires, compared to annual gross domestic product, has set a global record, above 75 percent (Economist 2014). The runner-up is Russia, with a radically lower 20 percent. Singapore’s rate is less, albeit the portion of tycoons whose wealth can be linked to the PAP-government is greater than in S. Korea or Taiwan, which have less egregious personal asset inequality. In HK, the Government is so thoroughly owned by the wealthy that it imposes major taxes only on salaries. Capital gains and dividends are tax-free, as is all income from outside. The Legislative Council (LegCo) passed its first Minimum Wage Ordinance only in 2010. But the law-making tycoons in “functional constituencies” diluted that law’s effects. Throughout the debate, they warned (critics said ‘kicked and screamed’) about “creeping socialism.” This was a crazy-rich irony, because the tiny fraction of the ‘one percent’ of wealthiest HK tycoons get their power over government from a once-proletarian CCP that has franchised business moguls as its proxies to run the city. Xi Jinping has not yet dethroned them, because doing so would hurt mainland capitalists who support him. HK’s World Trade Organization membership terms (different from the PRC’s) benefit Chinese companies by offering access to global technology, investments, and markets. Allies of the Party ‘core’ profit from formally keeping “two systems.”

HK Chinese tycoons have been favored proxies under Britain’s empire since the 1920s and then Beijing’s in recent decades. HK business people have major interests in mainland markets, despite their recent efforts to send more capital elsewhere. The richest of them, Li Ka-shing, has tensions with the CCP. Many tycoons understand pluralistic liberal institutions; they send their sons and daughters to Western universities; they rely on law courts that enforce contracts without favor to political interests. Future HK protests may target tycoons’ offices and residences when Chief Executive (CE) nomination committees, which they dominate, meet every five years to choose a new head for the local government. HK’s street protesters have trashed stores whose executives criticized them. News from other places, such as Paris or Santiago, shows that Hong Kong’s modern problems are not unique. Pent-up anger, as returns to capital outpace those to work, is widespread (Piketty 2014). But a lack of broad participation in HK’s political institutions, constrained by China’s, make problems of immediate material interests harder to solve there.

In Taiwan, income and asset inequalities, land prices, even garbage collections, have been lively political topics – and these issues contrast with the more existential problem of how to deal with a China that claims the right to use force against the island. Questions of class cleavage and asset equity are important on the island (Liu 2019). But they are less contentious there than in Hong Kong, where inequality is much greater and populist protest against it is more frequent. Equity issues crosscut the national identity disagreement, “green” vs. “blue,” even though a fear in the autonomist camp is that mainland China is using its economic size and proximity to affect the short-term interests of Taiwanese so as to change their long-term identities. “United front”

CCP cadres say this policy of using economic incentives to alter political values is normal and legitimate. It is standard operating procedure for them, in both Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In South Korea, as in the other “little dragons,” taxes and regulations are limited whenever new rules may hurt corporate profits. S. Korean party elders, not just state leaders, generally determine government personnel and policies (Mobrand 2014). If public participation that influences actual policy results is a plausible meaning of “democracy,” then its modern opposite is proud bureaucracy. “Legal rationality” dominates not just states, but also parties, armies, unions, and corporations. Unofficial bureaucracies are among Weber’s “iron cages,” imprisoning ordinary people just as surely as official ones do. Several recent South Korean presidents including Moon Jae-in have encouraged government engagements with the public and with unions (Lah 2019). But the largest *chaebol* managements are powerful, as is the state bureaucracy. Corporate decisions to tolerate or hinder increased workers’ participation is particularly important in South Korea. *Chaebol* are large, loosely linked to the state. In all four dragons, ordinary citizen engagements about human equity usually demand more resources. Regimes almost always differ, claiming that the economy should expand first.

4. Group/Individual Factors for or against Values Engagements

Dankwart Rustow (1970) and others, especially Latin Americanists who study elite ‘pacts,’ have convincingly shown that traditional, or socioeconomic, or equity/distributional factors do not by themselves determine the extent of popular participation in government. Other popular demands are constitutional. They are by the same token existential, because they demand public oversight of the state’s most distinctive trait: its claim rightfully to use violence. This is a matter of frequent disagreement among elites. Constitutional demands concern the kinds of political processes that are seen as legitimate or illegitimate. They are about procedures allowing or preventing engagements that affect groups’ and individuals’ values. When a procedural or constitutional question becomes pressing, specific decisions by specifiable elites manage it. The costs and benefits to state or non-state leaders may be influenced by traditions, social pluralization levels, or group equities – but when legitimate governance procedure is at stake, identifiable elites take jumps into political uncertainty and conflict about structures to implement values.

“Genuine” elections, in which independent parties nominate diverse candidates and voters choose among them, are usually touted in public as the modern means to get legitimate rulers. Practically all top officials in most countries these days claim to be democrats. Kim Jung-un is “elected” in North Korea (albeit not by means widely understood as modern). There is now a global norm, right or wrong, that civic consultations of popular opinion through free elections and related engagement methods are rightful. Lee Kwan-yew disparaged liberal democracy as insufficiently Asian, but this view was soon challenged by a politician who was just as Asian and soon was elected President of South Korea (Lee 1994, Kim 1994). Even those who in practice shirk democracy, practicing dynastic familism instead, admit that elections and engagements confirm their politics as modern. Lees or Xis or Kims (or Bushes or Etonians) often rule without formally being kings, but they also arrange to get elected.

Singapore's PAP uses elections by responding to them with better policies whenever its vote share declines. It even recruits a loyal opposition of "Nominated Members" and "Non-Constituency Members" into Parliament, partly to improve the quality of debate. Disloyal oppositionists, however, are often fiercely sued and face legal procedures on odd charges (Chee 2015). The PAP allows a diversity of views on many issues, except on PAP control and for the need in this city-state for respect to all 'races.' The Party runs slates in geographic districts, each led by an "anchor minister" responsible to assure that its list of candidates wins locally. This policy, and the appointment of non-opposition Singaporeans as statutory board members and sector representatives on the Future Economy Council, recruits new political elites (Woo 2019). So the PAP tries to plan its own future, not just Singapore's. A slogan in late-imperial China was that "officials should supervise while merchants manage" (*guandu shangban*). The PAP adapts this statist value, complemented with elections, as the legitimate procedure in its situation.

Singapore has not seen major street protests for decades – but a survey of Singaporeans showed that three-quarters of them at least initially supported Hong Kong citizens' movement to have a more effective say in government (SCMP 2019). PAP grandees, sipping their kopi-o as they read morning news from HK in mid-summer 2019, must have been aghast that a regime organized on Leninist principles could make so many blunders against its own interests. They value their habit of timely engagement with loyal collaborators, when the latter can be found. They sponsor state-industry engagements but avoid crony capitalism. "Singapore's success in industry engagement has often times hinged upon its relatively weaker record in public and civic engagement" (Woo 2019). If civic demands were repressed with more obvious government violence than the PAP has yet required to stay in power, then Hong Kong evidence suggests Singapore's economy could likewise decline with rising political engagement. A Singapore minister warned that if excessive state force were used by police there, it could create conditions like those roiling Hong Kong (Bloomberg 2019). Singapore's 'racial'/international context and history provide institutions that head off such a danger. This island is led by autocrats who give evidence they know their city is up-to-date, requiring performance legitimacy in politics through popular economic and social policies. Perhaps they sense they could be justly deposed if ever they fail to provide enough service overall. Functionalist logics, arguing that political stability requires that demands on governments not exceed available supports, may not meet academic fads among most current social scientists even after their cogent past presentations (Easton 1965, Huntington 1968) – but they still make sense to the governors of relatively successful "little dragons."

In Hong Kong as in Singapore legitimacy in political procedure is evaluated variously, and the historical context there is similarly diverse. Hong Kong grew as a threshold between two empires. The city has a pre-modern colonial rule-by-proxy-group-and-bureaucracy form of government that Beijing maintains from British times. The local HK constitution does not specify the polity in wholly public terms. It is corporatist, giving state power to private "functional constituencies," mostly in economic sectors. Hong Kong's government is not a sovereign entity; it is part of an ideologically centralist, ideally dictatorial regime. Centralist norms and local groups stymie each other. Many imperial regimes (Roman, British, American, Russian) have recruited intermediate elites as proxies in peripheral regions as they try to bring edges into empires. For example, China brought the West River basin, most of Guangxi Province, into its orbit by dubbing

as mandarins tribal ‘lords of the land’ (*tusi*) (Faure and Ho 2013). Mao in the 1950s even used the Dalai Lama as his proxy on the high plateau, until the latter fled to India. The Qing had brought Inner Mongolia into China similarly (Bello 2016), and the Party continues to appoint selected Mongols, Tibetans, and Uighurs as favored collaborator-elites (Wang 2009). In Taiwan, the CCP’s hoped-for proxy is the KMT, although the latter is not quite communist! Conflicts in Hong Kong hamper ‘united front work’ on Taiwan. Xi Jinping’s speeches group “Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan” together despite their differences. Xi may now believe increased coercion can bring HK and Taiwan to heel. This assessment might be accurate. Because HK and Taiwan are domestically existential issues in China, but not in the U.S., Xi probably supposes he will face scant eventual net cost. No matter what else happens, mainland passions about past national humiliations (*guochi*) remain easy to incite. Existential values override modern interests in these politics.

Freedoms of speech and assembly are highly valued by many citizens in Hong Kong, who turn out in large numbers on streets when they fear these will be limited. Resources for daily lives have been hurt by tycoons’ charges of high rents and food prices, but ending oligopolies remains difficult, since the oligopolists would have to agree to constitutional change. Functional constituencies in LegCo, and a CCP-directed majority on the CE election committee, have long been controversial – and have been criticized by sometime Government officials such as Christine Loh (2006, 2007), Leo Goodstadt (2013), and many others. Perhaps new “functional” constituencies, e.g., for youths, could replace some of the now-less-presentable ones. But this modern city’s political structure remains “disarticulated” (Scott 2000). LegCo private members’ motions pass into law under stricter rules than apply to Government bills; these may not even be officially debated until the CE allows such discussion. In LegCo geographical elections, the Hare-quota-and-remainder-in-multi-seat-districts method of counting ballots for party lists produces members who represent small minorities (sometimes winning seats with less than one-tenth of the district vote). When HK citizens cast ballots, few understand what they are doing. In LegCo contests, democrats usually receive three-fifths of the votes but less than one-third of the seats. Balloting for district councils more accurately reflects popular sentiments – and November 2019 elections replaced “pro-Beijing” majorities with “pro-democracy” ones in 17 of HK’s 18 districts.

As long as the CCP admits no need to give HK people certainty that their government can represent them more accurately, the legitimacy of officials remains dubious in the eyes of many citizens. Beijing bans reform toward the “genuine democracy” that HK youths recurrently demand. It constitutionally claims that, “Past elections for the Chief Executive since the return of Hong Kong have proven that the Election Committee has covered representative figures from all sectors of the Hong Kong community and achieved balanced participation of all sectors, and is therefore in conformity with the actual situation of Hong Kong” (text of Basic Law, Annex III, Instrument 24, 2014). The factual error of this assertion has been evident for years. Many Hong Kong people now want more say in government, partly because very many want less police tear gas and ferocity. These two demands are related but not identical, and it is unclear that the CCP will meet either.

State bureaucracies claim a monopoly of violence. But their reasons for using force, and the amount they use, affect their popular legitimacy. Tear gas was not deployed in the HKSAR until CE Leung authorized it against the 2014 Occupy Central protesters. By 2019, police use gas,

pepper spray, truncheons, and guns shooting rubber and real bullets. The police, now tribalized into a gang by street battles and the resulting social calumny against them, are dauntingly armored and armed. Their riot helmets look fit for alien soldiers in a bad movie about an intergalactic war. They are not just scary; they are trying to be so. Youths, correspondingly, find for themselves a cause in matching violence. When they feel their futures bleak, Hong Kong's future becomes so. Official brutality has risen, and protestors' brutality along with it. Both sides speak against violence, and both teach each other to be violent (cf. Coser 1956). But the police have stronger weapons and central leaders, who can increase or decrease levels of public violence, while the youths have homemade weapons and scant ability to discipline any splinter group that uses petrol bombs. The CCP's United Front Work Department cadres rightly understand that the spectacle of force by the police that they tacitly control creates political commitments, but they overfulfilled their quota – against their own interests. The political benefit went to their opponents.

A stated rationale for official violence is to deter “Hong Kong independence” - a meme that was nearly absent from public discourse until CE Leung, probably taking advice from Beijing, raised it to prominence in his 2015 policy address. The Basic Law assures HK a “high degree of autonomy,” but hardliners shave the meaning of that by asserting Beijing's “comprehensive jurisdiction” (State Council 2014). When the most obvious policy of a government is scariness and coercion to cow people, its legitimacy plummets.

The HK government, to legalize its ferocity, relies on a 1922 British colonial Emergency Ordinance. The state's commitment to coercion is shown by late-2019 denials of permissions for peaceful protests whose massiveness embarrassed the government, and by hasty police declarations that authorized marches turn into illegal ones – even for nonviolent participants – when any vandalism occurs. Police trapped students, besieging them on university campuses and arresting people as rioters when they came out - in most cases without evidence they did anything more than exercise their rights “of association, of assembly, of procession, and of demonstration” (Basic Law 2017, Art. 27). CE Lam criminalized protesters' facemasks – an act that did not deter youths who clearly break laws by throwing petrol bombs, but deterred peaceful protesters who fear future use of their images in facial recognition software. By April 2020, HK police arrested prominent democrats who had participated in peaceful demos and might mediate between the regime and frustrated youths, notably Martin Lee Chu-ming and at least eight other former LegCo members (Bloomberg 2020). These all espoused peaceful campaigning – which the HK Government detests more than violence because non-violence has a “participation advantage over violent insurgencies” (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 10). The huge sizes of peaceful protests had shamed the regime in 2003 and 2012, proving the unpopularity of decisions taken by leaders whom few citizens could choose. The timing of the 2020 arrests, amid the covid-19 virus scare, had nothing to do with opposing advocacy of violence. Avoiding awkwardly high numbers of demonstrators was of paramount importance to the dictatorship in HK, and the Party knew fear of the virus could reduce protests against arresting Chinese democrats.

CE Lam has been under public pressure from CCP hardliners and HK tycoons to maximize police force against protesters. Writers warn that People's Liberation Army soldiers from the mainland might storm into Hong Kong, using more bullets, as they did at Tiananmen in 1989. But

such troops could not, without huge political cost, do anything that the HK police have not already tried to do. HK youths have showed more capacity for violence than the 1989 Beijing students used. The Chinese state's policy is to intensify its many methods of counter-mobilization (Cheng 2019). Beijing hopes that Hong Kong's people will eventually tire of dissent. "Patriots" on the mainland support the national leaders more, because of their harshness in Hong Kong.

Street protesters in Hong Kong made five demands of the CE: do not resubmit a bill that could extradite HK people to mainland courts; establish an independent probe of police violence; amnesty arrested marchers; stop calling the political protests illegal riots; and enact universal suffrage with free nominations for CE. Lam conceded the first demand – while avowing that she should become better connected to HK people. The protesters' slogan is "five demands, not one less." The petition for constitutional reform is beyond Lam's remit. She cannot be a sincere interlocutor for that engagement. Xi is – but behind the "two systems" façade, he does not engage. The "one country, two systems" plan is one that he also advocates when talking about Taiwan, whose population is three times that of Hong Kong.

Memories of violence shape constitutional legitimacy in many places. On Taiwan, at the end of the 'Pacific War,' when Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese troops accepted Japanese surrenders, most islanders were welcoming. They knew their ancestors had come in previous centuries from South Fujian on the mainland. But the first mainlander-KMT government on Taiwan was unexpectedly violent. Its agents opened fire on civilians in February 1947 – after which Taiwanese briefly took over the island, before the KMT sent more troops to restore a coercive 'order' (Kerr 1965). The governor it sent was so corrupt and trigger-happy, and the mainlander party became so desperate to gain some legitimacy among Taiwanese, it later executed that governor. A serious land reform and liberalized commercial laws in the 1950s were likewise efforts by Chiang to garner Taiwanese support. Decades later, with this background, the constitution became democratic. Because a large majority (86 percent) of the islanders can identify as Taiwanese, their elected leaders now do so too.

Unofficial groups on the island have recently made novel efforts to connect the public with the government (Liu 2019). Each of these innovations is designed to supplement elections, not to replace them. "I-Voting" and "g0v.tw" sites use surveys and crowdsourcing to disseminate information about public views of issues. They affect policy but do not directly make it. A private webmaster started "g0v.tw" to improve an earlier official web about housing prices (which is an issue in all four 'dragons'.) Web-entrepreneurship has many precedents in East Asia. During the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic in Hong Kong, for example, an independent webmaster developed "www.sosick.com," improving on a HK Health Department site about the locations of SARS cases. To report the costs of air pollution, the Hedley Index, which is still active, was created by a professor of community health in HK (Jo and White 2013). The roof of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing had instruments testing that city's air for Particulate Matter 2.5, posting the amount on a website. This act by foreigners in China infuriated the CCP – but Chinese netizens wanted transparency; so now, the PRC government regularly posts online air pollution data for all major Chinese cities. In Taiwan, a further case of hi-tech engagement is Participatory Budgeting, a multi-stage deliberative process started by academics and local officials. Universities

have been crucial in sparking these improvements to democracy. Voting remains an important means of aggregating values and interests, but it is now complemented by other kinds of engagement too. Both frequent elections and new non-electoral forms of participation have strengthened Taiwan's democracy.

South Korea's constitutional democracy also emerged after experiences with violent dictators, especially Generals Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. Park was elected president in 1963, and economic expansion over the next decade made his regime popular despite political repression. By 1972, Park amended the constitution, making it more authoritarian. In mid-October 1979, he clamped down on a democratization movement in Busan and Masan – and by the end of that month, his intelligence chief assassinated him. Filling a leadership vacuum, Chun Doo-hwan consolidated coercive rule and expanded martial law – climaxing in massacres and rapes of civilians on May 18, 1980, in Gwangju. After many political twists and turns, popular reaction to this violence eventually legitimated the democratic constitution that guides the country today.

It should be no surprise that the lands of Samsung and Acer are both global pioneers of computer-based political engagement to supplement democratic elections. In South Korea, the Blue House presidential palace website sponsors "National Petitions" that legally require government officials to respond whenever 200,000 petitioners sign. This started as a way for state agencies to listen to complaints and try to manage them – not as a means of co-creating policy. But sometimes it does make policy. An insane man who committed a horrific crime was not let of jail because of a petition – and then the National Assembly changed the law, reflecting for future cases public feeling about that one. Historically, parliaments started as "General Courts," and now the internet has extended that principle in an unexpected way. South Korea's use of "Deliberative Polls" is multi-stage, involving not just one-off surveys, referenda, or elections but also randomly selected focus groups of voters, assembled for careful briefings by experts holding different views on complex issues. President Moon wanted to halt construction on two nuclear power plants, but a Deliberative Poll reversed that decision (although it also led Moon to disapprove starting work on new plants). When public problems are multifaceted and require expertise not just popularity for optimal solutions, one-off votes or referenda can lead to bad choices. Elections remain important in Taiwan and South Korea, as in Singapore where multi-stage conversation forums are also recurrent. Alongside voting, other means to moot issues in thought-through ways, with focus groups and experts, are being tried in these modern polities.

Taiwanese and South Korean examples make clear that studies of state-public engagement must now cover forms of participation that the usual political science of democracy does not stress because of its fixation on voting. When will "advanced" democracies become really advanced? The U.S. elects presidents who get fewer votes than their opponents. The U.K. puts a question as complex as Brexit into a simple yes-or-no referendum, without multiple-stage or expert consultations. These countries may become more democratically advanced when their constitution-makers realize that counting noses is just one method of public participation in policy – even if it remains the main one. New efforts toward fair and wise governance can be treated in terms that have long been used to analyze movements toward either authoritarianism or democratization. Sample theorists typify different causes of change or order: Huntington on

traditional values, Lipset on modern pluralizations, Boix on economic distributions, or Rustow on choices of constitutional legitimacy. There are several different roads to fairness in public life.

Governments tend to claim that the main highway to legitimacy is establishmentarian. Their discourse influences academics' concepts. As James Scott warns, "Social science is, in general, focused resolutely on the 'official' or 'formal' relations between the powerful and the weak," but this does not "exhaust what we might wish to know about power" (Scott 1992, 76). It does not exhaust what we need to know about ways of distinguishing behaviorally powerful actors from weak ones – except for a suspicion that the collectively powerful agents are more numerous. Also, it does not exhaust a need for attention to different kinds of issues, some of which are interests subject to ready aggregation, while others are existential values. Study of more diverse forms of "society-state" engagement will be basic to developing knowledge of how people use the powers they have.

Conclusion: Limits of Little Dragons

What is likely to happen to future civic engagement in the "four dragons"? Predictions are surprisingly easy to venture – and an unforeseen theme emerges from looking at them together.

South Korea will continue to have extensive civil engagements, especially against corruption, with left-right/worker-capitalist/union-business conflicts remaining prominent. What could alter that trajectory? Little could, except perhaps a collapse of the other state of the nation, North Korea – as is unlikely for many years yet, though not forever.

Taiwan similarly will retain strong habits of elections and consultations, along current lines, unless Xi Jinping decides to attack the island. His treatment of Hong Kong may suggest whether he has any other plan. As he calls Taiwanese his Chinese brothers and sisters, he might weigh the difficulties of an amphibious landing on Taiwan and delay the invasion option further.

Hong Kong's future of civic engagement is written into its Basic Law. If Beijing retains the current local constitution, then every five years the CE selections will produce mass dissent. Demos are also likely before regular LegCo elections, which are nearly guaranteed to produce hung parliaments because of the minoritarian Hare-quota ballot-counting method. If the "ultimate aim" of universal democratic suffrage fades further in the future, much unauthorized protest will continue – without much public participation in policy-making. What could change that pattern? Beijing might decide to abandon, or perhaps to honor, the "two systems" part of the "one country, two systems" slogan. The central elite already bans any practical distinction between its Party (*dang*) and China (*guo*, or *Zhongguo*). This defines liberals as un-Chinese. That kind of patriotism leads to wars and people's deaths (Kateb 2008). It is self-serving and may later more widely be seen as such. But the Party slows any evolution of political broadmindedness in China.

In Singapore, the government will continue to prioritize the city's prosperity and the stability of PAP rule. If that party-bureaucracy were to become totally identified with the nation in the eyes of citizens, as may not quite have happened, such a change could weaken Singapore. Only major anti-Chinese pogroms in Indonesia – which are not predictable and hopefully will not occur – would make the PAP leadership impose even more discipline on its flourishing island-city.

So to answer the question about the future of civic engagement in the “little dragons,” it is enough to point out that, in their neighborhoods, they are “little.” Changes elsewhere, in each case, are the main factors that can sharply alter the extents to which they allow civic participations. Internal causes of change are likely to be less important. There is frustration in each of them that their outside contexts, which they cannot control, are so important for their youths and prospects.

Will authoritarianism last forever in the most demanding external polity for two of them, i.e., mainland China that directly affects Hong Kong and Taiwan (and less directly, Singapore and South Korea too)? Autocratic government in China remains strong because it relies on intermediary elites, the heads of local “civil” polities such as conservative lineages and religious institutions that support the state (Mattingly 2019). But its Achilles heel may come from its strength, which breeds bureaucratic arrogance that disinclines state leaders to take their benefits from public engagements. They ignore popular sentiments at a peril that seems or is distant, especially when mass dissent still provides few leaders with whom to negotiate. Karl Marx (1852) in the “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” theorized that centralization of power can make an autocracy easier to overthrow. Will this happen in China? Probably not, at least for a long time. But popular defeats of authoritarian systems are “predictably unpredictable” (Kuran 1992).

Repeated public engagements anywhere, whether or not officially authorized, raise the bar that authoritarian regimes have to jump, before citizens are likely to be satisfied in the next such event (Truex 2019). Autocracies have value-legitimacy and interest-aggregation problems they deny, and their leaders’ bureaucratic dullness is obscured only by their nationalism. Politics would not be the spectacle that it is, for state and non-state actors alike, if tension between them ceased. So it is unlikely to stop.

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