Chapter 5
All Politics Is Local: Grassroots Strategy of Beijing-Sponsored Parties

The Chinese Communist Party has a long history of political organization in Hong Kong. The party was founded in 1921. By 1925, the CCP had successfully developed its membership in the former British colony (Kiang 2011, p. 52). As the KMT's purge of the CCP escalated in 1927, many mainland Communist members such as Zhou Enlai and Ye Jianying fled to Hong Kong for temporary sojourn. After the World War II, Hong Kong again became a refuge for many Communist and left-wing intellectuals, who escaped from the KMT-controlled areas in the mainland. Their arrival gave rise to the Ta Teh Institute, a college established by the CCP in Hong Kong in 1946. This institute produced more than 500 students who ended up joining the CCP in its military struggle against the KMT.

During the Chinese Civil War between 1945 and 1949, the CCP also took advantage of Hong Kong's freedom of the press and freedom of entry to expand its united front work. For example, the CCP sponsored a number of political parties to attract social and political elite who opposed the KMT. Of the eight "democratic parties" supported by the CCP, five were founded in the former British colony. Despite the KMT's rigorous border surveillance, the CCP was able to smuggle more than a thousand pro-CCP dignitaries through Hong Kong to the mainland in preparation for the establishment of the PRC. These dignitaries later became delegates of the first Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and high-ranking officials of the new Chinese government.

The importance of Hong Kong can be seen from the establishment of the CCP Hong Kong branch (*zhonggong xianggang fenju*) in 1947. All party organizations in the Guangdong and Guangxi provinces were under the leadership of this branch, which also supervised party organizations in neighboring provinces. In particular, the Hong Kong branch consisted of the Urban Work Committee (*chengshi gongzuo weiyuanhui*) and various local party committees (*diqu dangwei*) responsible for underground party activities and armed insurgencies in Southern China

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(Kiang 2011, p. 206). In the same year, the CCP also established the Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong Branch, which would later become a semiformal representative of the PRC in Hong Kong.[1]

In most cases, the Communists in Hong Kong kept a painstakingly low profile to avoid persecution by the colonial administration as well as the KMT. Instead of organizing activities in the name of the CCP, the Hong Kong Work Committee (*xianggang gongwei*), which was under the leadership of the CCP Hong Kong branch, helped set up a plethora of social organizations and companies to promote the CCP's ideology and recruit followers. In addition to the aforementioned Ta Teh Institute, examples include, but not limited to, secondary schools (e.g., Pui Kiu Middle School), trade unions (e.g., the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions), newspapers (e.g., Ta Kung Pao, Wen Wei Po), and movie production companies (e.g., Great Wall Movie, Feng Huang Motion Pictures). Note that the CCP assumed a leadership role in at least some, if not all, of these social organizations.[2] Although the colonial administration's attitude toward these CCP-sponsored entities was far from friendly, as evidenced by its forceful shutdown of the Ta Teh Institute, together with 92 pro-CCP schools in 1949 (Li 1997, p. 38), it did permit many of them to survive until 1997.

As for the KMT, it could not openly carry out anti-Communist missions in this British colony, but it did send intelligence agents and mobilized its affiliated groups to sabotage and subvert the CCP-affiliated organizations in Hong Kong. Most notably, the KMT made a number of attempts to assassinate CCP cadres who were stationed there (Kiang 2011, pp. 212–214).

Part of the reason for the colonial administration's unfriendly attitude is that CCP cadres had used Hong Kong as a strategic base to provide support, often clandestinely, for their armed struggles in the mainland as well as in the city. In the late 1920s, Nie Rongzhen, one of the ten Great Marshals of the People's Liberation Army, ran a military course in Hong Kong to train cadres (Nie 2005, p. 83). In 1929, the CCP set up an underground radio broadcast station in Kowloon to facilitate the communication between various revolution bases in Southern China (Zi 2004, pp. 58–59). During World War II, the Eighth Route Army under the command of Mao Zedong and Zhu De established an office in Hong Kong to create an anti-Japanese guerrilla troop known as the Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade (*gangjiu zhidui*) (Qiang 2008, p. 23). Declassified documents of the PRC government also indicate that Beijing secretly aided Hong Kong's transport workers who went on strike in 1950 (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Party Literature

[1]The actual job responsibilities of the Xinhua News Agency were far more than representing the PRC. As its former director, Zhou Nan, recounts, the agency was responsible for publicity, political organization, grassroots work, and united front work in Hong Kong (Zong 2007, p. 347).

[2]Zhang Junsheng, the former vice director of the Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong Branch, confides in his memoir that pro-Beijing newspapers such as *Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao* could not openly admit the fact that they were led by the CCP (You et al. 2011, p. 136). In the memoir of Ng Hong-man, the former principal of Pui Kiu Middle School, he revealed that he as the school principal had to take orders from the Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong Branch.

Research Office 1998, p. 224). In addition, there were reported cases of Communist infiltration into the Hong Kong Police Force. One known case was Tsang Siu-fo, a high-ranking Hong Kong police officer, who was deported to the mainland in 1961 for conducting espionage operations in the former British colony (Kiang 2012, pp. 102–107). Owing to the variety of missions and operations assigned by higher authorities, Communist members in Hong Kong were expected to observe a doctrine laid down by Mao Zedong: hiding professionally, lurking indefinitely, accumulating power, and waiting for opportunities (*yinbi jinggan, changqi maifu, jixu liliang, yidai shiji*) (Mao 1976). They were not allowed to disclose their party membership unless their superiors instructed them to do so (You et al. 2011, p. 144).

Given its extensive underground activities in the former colony, one would expect that the CCP would not shy away from meddling in Hong Kong's affairs after gaining the city's sovereignty. Interestingly, this is not the case. While pro-Beijing organizations and groups still exist and proliferate, CCP cadres have continued to maintain an invisible presence in the city. There is no formal office representing the CCP in Hong Kong. Nor is there any official figure of CCP membership in the city. A primary reason for this anomaly is that the June 4 Incident has severely tarnished the legitimacy of the CCP, which became a synonym for "unjust," "illiberal," and "brutal." For CCP cadres who want to seek an elected office in Hong Kong, their membership has lapsed into a political liability, rather than an asset.

Yet low visibility does not equal weak influences. Having spent decades infiltrating into Hong Kong's society and conducting united front work and other political operations, the CCP had acquired at least a basic knowledge of Hong Kong society at large and an extensive experience of fostering local support networks to advance its political interests. It was waiting for a harvest time, which arrived in 1997. In this chapter, I examine how Beijing has relied on its sponsored parties to undermine the prodemocracy opposition in postcolonial Hong Kong.

5.1 The Pro-Beijing Camp: Changes and Continuities

In Hong Kong, there are many pro-Beijing parties, which are collectively known as the pro-establishment camp. On major political issues, the pro-establishment camp votes faithfully along the lines of Beijing in the LegCo. A notable example is to ban the motion to vindicate the student activists of the 1989 prodemocracy movement in Beijing. This motion, which is moved by prodemocracy legislators every year before the anniversary of the June 4 Incident, has never been passed since the retrocession due to the pro-establishment camp's steadfast opposition. On the issue of political liberalization, the pro-establishment camp has also from time to time voted against bills proposed by prodemocracy opposition parties. In the eyes of many prodemocracy voters, therefore, the pro-establishment camp is a stumbling block to democratization.

It is erroneous, however, to treat all pro-establishment parties as a monolithic entity. Some parties are arguably closer to Beijing than others. An example of parties with a close relationship with Beijing is the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), a pro-Beijing labor union-cum-party, which was founded in 1948. Its core members were fervent believers of Communism and disciples of the CCP, at least in the early years. For decades, they were known as the "leftists," who helped promote CCP's doctrines in Hong Kong. Organizationally, the FTU had cozy, albeit opaque, linkages to the CCP. Xu Jiatun, the former head of the Xinhua News Agency in the 1980s who defected to the United States after 1989, exposed the cryptic connection by pointing out that "'leftist' unions [in Hong Kong] are under the leadership of the CCP" (Xu 1993, p. 148). Its intimate connection with the CCP can also be reflected from how it was treated by the colonial administration during the Cold War. In the year after its establishment, a number of unionists of the FTU were deported back to the mainland, as the colonial administration decided to clamp down on the Communist movement in the city (Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions 2013, pp. 21, 34–35).

Another party close to Beijing is the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB). When Beijing finalized the Basic Law in 1990, it was clear that party politics would be unavoidable in postcolonial Hong Kong, as the Basic Law allows for a fair number of popularly elected legislative seats. Beijing, thus, needed to foster a local party to serve as its proxy in the emerging party politics. In 1992, the DAB was founded. Its founding members all had an impeccable "leftist" pedigree. The first chairman, Jasper Tsang, was the principal of a preeminent "leftist" secondary school, Pui Kiu Middle School. The vice-chairman, Tam Yiu-chung, was a leader of the FTU. Chan Yuen-han, DAB's standing committee member, also came from the FTU. The Party Secretary, Cheng Kai-nam, taught at Pui Kiu Middle School. One of the Central Committee members, Elsie Leung, who later became the HKSAR's first Secretary for Justice, was a student of Chung Wah Middle School, a "leftist" school set up by her grandfather.[3] A cogent indicator of the DAB's political significance is that in the very month when it was established, its leaders were invited to Beijing to meet with Jiang Zemin, the then General Secretary of the CCP.

In contrast, the Liberal Party (LP), a pro-Beijing party that represents the interests of the business elite, has relatively weak ties with Beijing. Historically, the business elite in Hong Kong had not been close to the CCP for a good reason; the ideology of the CCP had been fundamentally against capitalism. It was not until the 1980s, when Chinese leaders implemented domestic economic reforms and dealt with Hong Kong's sovereignty transfer, did Beijing begin consciously co-opting Hong Kong's business elite (Wong 2012). To Beijing, these elite served two important functions. First, they could provide capital and technological know-how to modernize the PRC's economy. Second, Hong Kong witnessed a massive emigration wave in the

[3]The colonial administration decided to permanently close Chung Wah Middle School after the "1967 Leftist Riots" (Bickers and Yep 2009).

1980s, as many Hong Kong people lacked confidence in the reunification with the PRC. Beijing needed to seek the economic elite's support to halt capital flight (Qiang 2008, p. 177). From the business elite's perspective, they also had an incentive to switch their allegiance from Great Britain to Beijing, because they wanted to preserve their business interests beyond 1997.

The resulting alliance between Beijing and Hong Kong's business elite is therefore grounded in mutual benefits, rather than shared ideologies.[4] Perhaps for this reason, the bonding between Beijing and the LP has never been as tight as that of between Beijing and the FTU or the DAB. The political fallout of the July 1, 2003 protest attests this point. The Tung administration was forced to suspend the legislation of the national security laws to a large extent because the maverick chairman of the LP, James Tien, unexpectedly resigned from the Executive Council. To some members of the traditional pro-Beijing elite, James Tien's political integrity is questionable (Li 2010, p. 67), as he could desert a political ally in times of emergency. In this respect, one can reasonably assume that Beijing is likely to find the LP less reliable than the traditional "leftist" elite or what I call "Beijing-sponsored parties."

This distinction is crucial in the following discussion. It tells us who in the pro-establishment camp is more likely to win Beijing's trust. Simply put, of all the pro-establishment parties, Beijing-sponsored parties are the ones that Beijing would turn to when the need arises, given their ideological affinity and potential organizational linkages with mainland authorities such as the CCP. What can these parties offer to Beijing? They have at least two functions. The first is to safeguard Beijing's interests in Hong Kong, which include assisting the HKSAR government to govern effectively and thereby increase public support for the HKSAR government as well as for the PRC. Their second function is to provide updated information to Beijing, so that Beijing can devise appropriate policies for Hong Kong.

This is not to say that the interests of Beijing-sponsored parties and those of Beijing are always aligned. Scholars of Chinese politics have long observed that local officials are able to find ways to circumvent policy directives imposed by the Central Government (*shangyou zhengce, xiayou duice*) (O'Brien and Li 1999). The relationship between Beijing and the pro-Beijing elite in Hong Kong is not immune to this principal-agent problem. The most illustrative example is the "1967 Leftist Riots."

In 1967, the Cultural Revolution was sweeping China. Inspired by the mainland's radical mass movement, the "leftists" in Hong Kong orchestrated a series of mass mobilization events, in hopes of undermining, if not overthrowing, the colonial administration. They called upon the masses to take part in street protests, strikes,

[4]Li Xiao-hui, a deputy editor-in-chief of the pro-Beijing mouthpiece Wen Wei Po provides one ideological distinction between the traditional leftist elite and the conventional pro-establishment elite. He argues that the traditional pro-Beijing elite (*qingzhongpai*) support the socialist system in the mainland and the CCP leadership, whereas some conventional pro-establishment elite only show respect to the PRC's socialist system, which they do not totally agree with (Li 2010, p. 56). Li's view may reflect how Beijing authorities see the pro-establishment camp in Hong Kong.

and school walkouts, which were met with the colonial government's heavy-handed repression. Some "leftist" activists retaliated by resorting to terrorism; they planted homemade bombs near police stations, government offices, banks and on busy streets, causing some casualties and seriously disrupting social order. Ordinary Hong Kong citizens balked at the extremism of the "leftists," who seemed to bring more harm to local Chinese than to colonists. A heavily cited example of the atrocity associated with the "1967 Leftist Riots" was the murder of a Chinese radio talk show host, who did nothing but making satirical comments about the "leftists."

The mess that the Hong Kong "leftists" created annoyed the then premier Zhou Enlai, who had no intention to disturb the political status quo of the former British colony. He summoned leaders of the Hong Kong Work Committee (*xianggang gongwei*) to Beijing to "sober their minds" (Kiang 2012, p. 266). As the major organizers were made to stay in Beijing for about two months, the riots in Hong Kong gradually died down. The 1967 Leftist Riots were later termed as a serious "left-leaning adventurism mistake" (*zuoqing maojin zhuyi*) (Ng 2011, p. 178). The riots disturbed Beijing's grand overarching strategic plan with respect to Hong Kong, i.e., "long-term planning and full utilization" (*changqi dasuan, chongfen liyong*).[5] In addition, the identities of many underground Communists or CCP supporters were exposed during the riots, making them the victims of the colonial administration's subsequent repression (Ng 2011, p. 85). Worse still, their extremism alienated the majority of Hong Kong citizens, severely tarnishing the reputation of the pro-Beijing elite in Hong Kong. To this day, the riots remain a social stigma in Hong Kong.

In 1976, Liao Chengzhi, the person-in-charge of Hong Kong affairs in Beijing, called up a meeting to rectify Beijing's Hong Kong policy. The meeting censured the ultraleft elements behind the 1967 Leftist Riots and reaffirmed a pragmatic approach (Li 1997, p. 64). A new institution, Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, was established as a result. This new office, headed by Liao himself, was responsible for administering and supervising Hong Kong affairs. From then on, pragmatism triumphed over ideology in Beijing's Hong Kong policy. Class struggle was brushed aside, while united front work was emphasized. In his memoir, Xu Jiatun recollected what Deng Xiaoping told him to do as the head of the Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong during the 1980s, "Dare to be a great rightist, a great spy" (Xu 1993, p. 122), implying that Xu was expected to mingle with the rich and powerful in Hong Kong, with the ultimate aim of co-opting them in preparation for the city's eventual unification with the PRC. This policy change makes eminently good sense, as what Beijing needed to achieve by the 1980s was to win the hearts and minds of Hong Kong people, rather than pestering an outgoing colonial government.

It is important to note that the 1967 Leftist Riots were the exception rather than the rule. "Leftists" in Hong Kong adhered to Beijing's political lines most of

[5]Hong Kong as a British colony at that time provided a crucial outlet for the PRC's exports. Chinese leaders, therefore, had no plan of changing the political status quo of the city.

the time. Especially in the 1980s and beyond, Hong Kong's reunification with the mainland became an important item on the national agenda. Beijing kept a close eye on Hong Kong's political development. It would be difficult for these local agents to deviate from their assigned roles even if they wanted to do so. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, the "leftists" in Hong Kong have gone through difficult times that helped transform themselves. First, the ultraleft faction lost much ground after the 1967 Leftist Riots. Second, Beijing's brutal crackdown of the peaceful student-led prodemocracy movement in 1989 further disillusioned many of those who had once been staunch supporters of the CCP. Some decided to leave the "leftist" camp permanently, while many of those who chose to stay were humbled and changed from ideologues to pragmatists.

Because Beijing-sponsored parties follow Beijing's political lines more closely than other parties within the pro-establishment camp, if one wants to study how Beijing makes use of its local proxies to shape Hong Kong politics to its desired direction, one cannot avoid analyzing these Beijing-sponsored parties. In addition, they occupy more legislative seats and have far more members and supporters than other pro-establishment parties, so they are an important subject of study in their own right. The focus of this chapter is therefore on these Beijing-sponsored parties.

5.2 Building a United Front at the Grassroots

As mentioned, Beijing has been attempting to co-opt Hong Kong's social and economic elite since the 1980s, in hopes of soliciting their political support, or at least neutralizing them, so that they would not be in opposition to Beijing. However, co-opting the rich and powerful alone was insufficient for allaying Beijing's fear because it was clear by the early 1990s that the HKSAR government would inherit from the colonial government a strong opposition force. Indeed, by the end of the colonial rule, the Democratic Party (DP) emerged as a formidable opposition, as its prodemocracy ideology had an enormous appeal in the former British colony. Thanks to the winner-take-all nature of the plurality rule, an electoral formula adopted by the colonial government in its last legislative election, the DP managed to capture 12 of the 20 directly elected seats. Together with additional seven indirectly elected seats of the functional constituencies, it became the largest political party in the colonial legislature. This was not an outcome that the Beijing government wanted to see for good reason. The leading members of the DP such as Szeto Wah were simultaneously controlling another political group, the Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement of China (ASPDMC), whose central tenets included "ending one-party dictatorship [in China]" and "building a democratic China."

To curtail the political influences of the DP, Beijing unilaterally declared that the term of the DP-dominated legislature was over and replaced it immediately after the handover with a provisional legislature whose members were supported by Beijing. Although an election of the Legislative Council was held a year later,

Beijing changed the rules of the game; it replaced the plurality rule with proportional representation. As a result of this rule change, the seat share of pro-Beijing parties significantly increased. In addition, the Chinese government continued to allow the existence of the functional constituencies. Because the playing field of the functional constituencies has been skewed heavily toward the business elite, rather than ordinary citizens, Beijing has been able to exert more influence on the election outcomes.

By dictating the rules of the election, Beijing might have reduced the opposition politicians' presence in the legislature, but it achieved little against their overriding popularity in the city. As mentioned, the prodemocracy opposition enjoyed a wide appeal in Hong Kong, especially after the June 4 Incident. A concurrent political development in Hong Kong during the 1980s was gradual liberalization of the political system for local participation. Many Hong Kong people came to see that building a democratic institution was perhaps the only effective way to check the Chinese Leviathan state. Conceivably, such a political environment was favorable to the opposition elite, whose prodemocracy stance won it immense popular support in successive elections.

Beijing could not challenge the political credentials of the prodemocracy camp without building its own political support base. However, it has been hamstrung by the institutional setup it designed for Hong Kong; under the "one country, two systems" principle, Chinese officials or members of the CCP are not supposed to meddle with Hong Kong's internal affairs. In addition, the June 4 Incident reinforced the political stigma that the CCP had carried in this former colony, where a significant portion of the population consisted of refugees who fled Communist China. Under such circumstances, Beijing, for many years, had tried to avoid any overt intervention in the city's politics, for fear that such an action would alienate, rather than appease, the Hong Kong public.

These political constraints are not insurmountable, however. Given its extensive experience of mass movement, Beijing overcame these constraints by forging a grassroots united front in support of its interests, with the help of the pro-Beijing force it has fostered for years. Qiang Shigong, a law professor of Peking University, argues that introducing democracy to Hong Kong worries Beijing because Hong Kong people tended not to identify themselves with the state of the PRC. For this reason, as Qiang points out, Deng Xiaoping laid down a rule of thumb for governing Hong Kong: fully utilize the function of the united front work to empower the pro-Beijing elements in the city (Qiang 2008, p. 183). Indeed, as early as in 1982, when Deng Xiaoping was receiving a delegation of Hong Kong social and economic elites in Beijing, he made it clear that Hong Kong needed to have political organizations to produce the city's own ruling elite (Li 1997, p. 80). Deng reiterated the same point when he met the Hong Kong delegates to the second session of the Sixth National People's Congress held in 1984 (Ng 2011, p. 188). The key to strengthen the united front, according to Deng, is to consolidate the "grassroots work" (*jiceng gongzuo*) (Zong 2007, p. 346). Later in 1990, when Jiang Zemin gave a speech on united front work, he stressed that the CCP should unite as many Hong Kong people as possible, in order to pave the way for the PRC's takeover of the city (Zhonggong Zhongyang

Wenxian Yanjiushi 1991, p. 1128). A month later, the CCP issued a notice, calling for an aggressive expansion of united front work in Hong Kong, using organizations and multiple channels to unite people from all walks of life (Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi 1991, p. 1209).

Beijing-sponsored parties have responded positively to the PRC leaders' calling. The FTU set up its first District Services Center (*diqu fuwuchu*) in 1992 and expanded to 16 by 2013. This union-cum-party is candid about their electoral concerns behind the establishment of these centers: "Districts... are an important base for electoral votes... For this reason the FTU has given high priority to district works" (Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions 2013, p. 136). The same is true for the DAB. As mentioned, many of the founding members of the DAB actually came from the FTU. Not surprisingly, this party also shares a similar vision with respect to grassroots organizations. Indeed, one of the stated missions of the DAB is to provide services at the grassroots level (DAB 2013b). Its first chairman, Jasper Tsang, points out that prior to 1997, party resources were directed to the development of local district offices, and he takes pride in that strategy (Yuen 2011, p. 11).

5.3 Beijing-Sponsored Parties' Incentives

As discussed, the central-local relations in China are often plagued by the principal-agent problem. But on the issue of developing grassroots networks, the interests between Beijing and Beijing-sponsored parties converge. The reason is that in order for Beijing-sponsored parties such as the DAB to compete with the pan-democrats over the directly elected seats in the legislature, they need to maximize their popular support. But one of the most salient electoral cleavages in the post-1997 Hong Kong has been democratization (Ma and Choy 1999; Ma 2007a). Pan-democratic candidates have frequently exploited this ideological cleavage in times of elections. They urge the government to implement universal suffrage of the Chief Executive and abolish the functional constituencies, while criticizing the pro-establishment camp as a hurdle to democratization. In this intensely ideological confrontation, pro-establishment parties have difficulties presenting a convincing counterargument against the pan-democrats' call for political liberalization (Sing 2010).

One of my interviewees, a District Councillor who belongs to the pro-establishment camp, bluntly puts it, "Society has become too ideologically polarized now. The pro-establishment camp cannot play the ideology card against the pan-democrats. What ideology can pro-establishment parties sell to voters? Patriotism? No way. Hong Kong people don't buy that."[6]

Indeed, many pro-establishment legislators themselves were the beneficiaries of the political status quo; they managed to enter the LegCo through the non-directly elected functional constituencies. Any reason raised by these legislators in

[6]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 11, 2013 (Code: 15).

opposition to further political liberalization is easily perceived by voters as a defense of their vested interest, rather than as a genuine concern for the well-being of Hong Kong society.

"To compete against the pan-democrats," the District Councillor explains, "pro-establishment parties need to avoid the talk of ideology, and focus on practical works [community services]." His remark explains why some pro-establishment parties have an incentive to undertake grassroots works. Because they can hardly challenge the pan-democrats' position over the dominant cleavage of democratization, they have to exploit other issue areas to distinguish themselves and to attract political support. Grassroots service is a natural choice for three reasons.

First, grassroots service is instrumental in building a close relationship with local constituents. One District Councillor points out that during his first term, he organized an apartment renovation project for a housing estate in his district.[7] The project required a home visit to the apartment of the interested home owners to check the renovation needs. After this project, he got to know the majority of the residents. More importantly, he obtained contacts and some important household demographic information through the home visit. This information is useful not only for getting out the vote on election day but also for finding volunteer helpers, the kind of human resources that are vital to his general service undertakings.

Second, citizens who value or have a strong demand for grassroots constituency services tend to be the least ideological. I have been told by more than one District Councillor[8] that of all the demographic groups, the elderly is by far the "easiest catch." This is in part because elderly people do not need to leave the district for work or for study. As they always stay in the neighborhood, they are likely to notice the variety of services that the District Councillor offers. In addition, many senior citizens are indifferent to politics, let alone the ideological confrontation between the two dominant political camps. There are reported cases where senior citizens vote for someone whose name they could not utter; all they know about the person is his candidate number because this is the only piece of information they received from some pro-Beijing group that organized a day-trip for these elderly people on election day (Apple Daily 2012a).

Third, pro-establishment parties have a comparative advantage of offering grassroots services because of their ample resources. Take the leading pro-establishment party, the DAB, as an example. The DAB is arguably the wealthiest political party in Hong Kong. The political donations it received in 2013 reached HK$97 million, while the two largest prodemocracy parties, namely, the DP and the Civic Party, combined received only about a fifth of that amount. More remarkably, the DAB's income, as may be seen from Fig. 5.1, has skyrocketed since 2003, dwarfing its pan-democratic counterparts.

[7]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 31, 2013 (Code: 20).

[8]Personal interviews with District Councillors on January 2, 2013, January 9, 2013, and January 23, 2013 (Code: 9, 13, and 19).

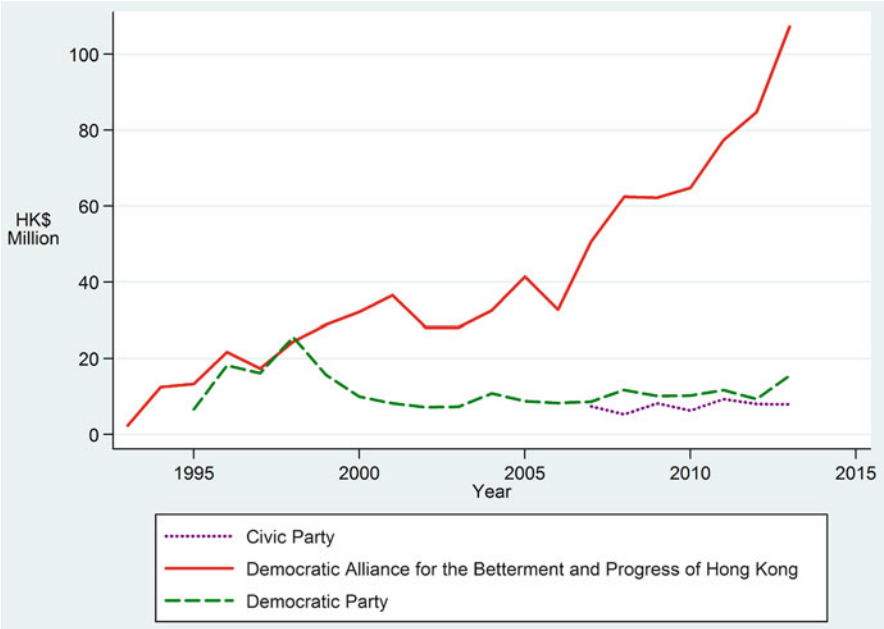

Fig. 5.1 Annual income by party (Source: Annual financial statements of the respective parties, retrieved from the HKSAR Companies Registry)

The great discrepancy in resources partly results from the business sector's reluctance to offer political donation to the prodemocracy camp for fear of provoking Beijing. This severely constrains the prodemocracy parties' ability to raise financial resources. In contrast, Beijing-sponsored parties seem to have little difficulty raising funds from the business sector. For example, in its 2012 fundraising dinner, the DAB received nearly HK$20 million donations from local tycoons (Wen Wei Po 2012c). During the same event in 2014, the DAB even raised HK$68.38 million(Wen Wei Po 2014a). Remarkably, the director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR, the successor of the Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong Branch, openly assisted with fundraising by singing a song on stage and donating his own calligraphy work, which raised HK$11 million and HK$13.8 million, respectively. Many speculate that political contribution to Beijing-sponsored parties helps the donors gain Beijing's trust, if not also gain more business opportunities.

Beijing-sponsored parties are rich not only in financial capital but also in human resources. The DAB has over 20,000 members, while the DP only has around 700. The FTU offers another illustrative example. This labor union-cum-party has 300,000 members. It has set up a team of volunteer workers for community services in virtually every single district. Four of these volunteer teams contributed over 10,000 man-hours to do community services in 2002 (FTU 2002). As a comparison, the DP is unable to afford setting up a local party branch in every district, and some of the local branches it has do not even have a regular office.

The disparity is not surprising. As a Beijing-sponsored party, the DAB and FTU can offer many tangible and intangible benefits to its members, ranging from perks and privileges to business connections in the mainland (Wen Wei Po 2009). In contrast, members of the opposition movement face censure and ostracism directly and indirectly from Beijing. For instance, many members of the Democratic Party are denied entry to the mainland (South China Morning Post 2013). Many business groups would not place advertisements in prodemocracy news media for fear of displeasing Beijing (Ma 2007b).

The three reasons discussed above suggest that Beijing-sponsored parties share congruent interest with Beijing in fostering grassroots political networks. While Beijing needs a local support coalition to counter the political influences of the pan-democrats, Beijing-sponsored parties require such networks to provide grassroots service, which in turn helps them develop an alternative issue ownership to compete for the geographical constituencies. Of course, their ambition may not be confined to the geographical constituencies only. One of my interviewees, a District Councillor of the DAB,[9] candidly admits that his party's aggressive expansion at the grassroots level aims to prepare itself for taking over the government in the future (*quanmian zhizheng*).

5.4 Beijing-Sponsored Parties' Grassroots Strategy in Action

A good starting point of studying Beijing-sponsored parties' grassroots strategy is the District Councils, which are the lowest administrative rung of the HKSAR government. Because the office of the District Councils is elected, this government tier is a battlefield between pro-establishment parties and the pan-democratic camp. In particular, Beijing-sponsored parties have devoted an enormous amount of resources to expand their turf in the District Councils. Thus far, their efforts have paid off, as they have gradually crowded out the pan-democrats. Table 5.1 shows the number of seats controlled by different political camps over the years. As may be seen from the table, the seat share of Beijing-sponsored parties has increased from 101 in 1999 to 147 in 2011. Note, however, this is the most conservative estimate of the power of the pro-establishment camp in the District Councils. If the definition of the pro-establishment camp includes self-proclaimed independent District Councillors who have close ties with pro-establishment social groups such as the Heung Yee Kuk, this camp actually controls 315 seats or three quarters of the total District Council seats in 2011. In contrast, the seat share of pan-democratic parties dropped from 106 to 83 in the same period.

The political ascendancy of Beijing-sponsored parties at the District Council level requires two factors: (1) they are able to defend the District Council Constituencies they have already occupied, and (2) they are able to encroach on the District Council Constituencies that their rivals are occupying. I discuss each factor in this section.

[9]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 3, 2013 (Code: 11).

Table 5.1 Number of District Council seat by political camp

	1999	2003	2007	2011
Beijing-sponsored parties	101	76	115	147
Pro-establishment parties	128	105	147	175
Pro-establishment parties and individuals	129	166	238	315
Pan-democratic parties	106	128	95	83

Source: Electoral Affairs Commission

Notes: Beijing-sponsored parties include the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), and the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance (HKPA). The HKPA merged into the DAB in 2005. Pro-establishment parties include the Civil Force, the Liberal Party (LP), the New People's Party (NPP), and all Beijing-sponsored parties. Some self-proclaimed independent District Councillors may be considered as pro-establishment or pro-Beijing due to their affiliation with pro-establishment social groups such as the Heung Yee Kuk. Pan-democratic parties include the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL), the Civic Act-Up, the Civic Party (CP), the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU), the Citizens Party, the Democratic Party (DP), the Frontier, the League of Social Democrats (LSD), the Neo Democrats (ND), the Neighborhood and Workers Service Centre (NWSC), and People Power (PP)

5.4.1 Defending Their Own Turf

In order to grasp pro-establishment parties' strategies to defend their occupied seats, it is important to understand the nature and function of the District Council office. The British government planned to introduce some democratic practices to Hong Kong toward the end of its colonial rule (Lau and Kuan 2000). The establishment of the District Boards in 1982 was the first step of this limited democracy reform (Ma 2007a). Although the District Boards served only grassroots constituencies, their political significance was far reaching, for they were the first government body in the colony that experienced a democratic election.[10] Their long-lasting impact is evidenced by the fact that many politicians from the prodemocracy camp, such as Lee Wing-tat and Sin Chung-kai, carved out their political careers first in the District Boards, where they developed their political support base through the articulation of grassroots interests (Ma 2007a). It is also noteworthy that although the British government had no intention of using the District Boards to promote party politics (Lau and Kuan 2002), this elected body did give rise to some grassroots prodemocracy political parties, for example, the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (Ma 2012), which remains active in the legislature to this day.

After 1997, the District Boards were renamed the District Councils. There are altogether eighteen districts in Hong Kong, each of which consists of dozens of

[10]Only one-third of the members in the District Boards were democratically elected in 1982, with the rest of the seats occupied either by government appointees or officials. The number of directly elected seats gradually increased afterward. In 1994, all District-Board seats became popularly elected.

District Council members (also known as District Councillors).[11] The majority of these members are individually elected from subdistricts known as District Council Constituencies using the single-member district formula. The geographical area that these subdistricts oversee is very small. Each District Council Constituency (DCC) is supposed to house around 17,000 dwellers. But given the city's high population density, the actual physical size of a District Council Constituency may span no more than a dozen of apartment buildings. The tiny size of the District Council Constituencies severely limits what District Councillors can deliver.

In addition to the geographical factor, District Councillors are also constrained by the formal function of their office. According to the District Council Ordinance, a council has only two functions:

1. It advises the government:
   I. on matters affecting the well-being of people in the district;
   II. on the provision and use of public facilities and services within the district;
   III. on the adequacy and priorities of government programmes for the district;
   IV. on the use of public funds allocated to the district for local public works and community activities.
2. District Councils can undertake the following items in the district when funds are allocated by the government:
   I. environmental improvements in the district;
   II. the promotion of recreational and cultural activities in the district;
   III. community activities in the district (Registration and Electoral Office 2011).

In other words, the law stipulates that a District Council provides nothing more than an advisory role to the government (Cheng 2004). As an advisory body, District Councillors have no formal administrative power over policies – even policies related to their tiny constituency. District Councillors can propose a policy recommendation to the government, but whether the policy is implemented or not is entirely up to the government.[12]

The only area where a District Councillor can have a more solid control is government subventions. Each District Councillor is entitled to a monthly subsidy worth about HK$24,000 that can be used to pay for her office expenditure and local activities. Meager as it is, it provides many pan-democratic District Councillors a stable source of income to finance community services. In addition, there are two government subventions at the District Councils' disposal.[13] One is an

[11] As of 2012, there were 412 District Councillors who were directly elected.

[12] For instance, several pro-establishment and prodemocracy District Councillors in East Kowloon had advocated, respectively, a project to develop a business district in their constituencies; but their suggestion had remained on paper for more than a decade. It was not until 2011, when the Chief Executive announced to implement the "Kick-Starting the Development of East Kowloon," which incorporated their suggestions by providing more office spaces in the district.

[13] There are many more public funds for community development not tailored for the District Councils, although District Councillors may also apply for them.

earmarked subsidy program for community activities.[14] Another is the "District Minor Works Program." District Councillors can apply for this program in order to "improve local facilities, living environment, and hygiene conditions (Home Affairs Department 2012b)," such as adding rain shelters over bus stops and chess tables in playgrounds.[15] In 2013, District Councils received a windfall: the government allocated a one-off HK$100 million to each of the 18 districts to implement the "Signature Project Scheme" to "address the needs of the district[s]." Note that any proposed use of these earmarked funds requires the approval of a District Council. Because pan-democratic District Councillors have already been reduced to a minority in all 18 District Councils, pan-democratic parties have basically no control of how these funds are used.

With this constrained decision-making power and limited geographical reach, the services that District Councillors are able to bring to their constituencies are often particularistic in nature. In general, such services can be classified into two types: (a) welfare and recreational activities and (b) problem-solving.

(a) Welfare and Recreational Activities

First, consider welfare and recreational activities. A popular expression with a certain derogatory connotation for such activities is "snake soup, vegetarian dishes, cakes, and dumplings" (*shezhai bingzhong*). Indeed, many District Councillors I have interviewed regularly organize discounted banquet dinners (for some reason, such feasts often feature snake soups), run day-trips to local tourist attractions, offer free flu shots, and distribute complimentary cakes and dumplings to local residents during traditional Chinese festivals.[16] These services are popular among grassroots citizens who may be otherwise unable to afford them at a regular price. Through these activities, the District Councillors can reach out to more local residents. Perhaps more importantly, they can obtain their contacts, which are crucial for election campaigns.

Shrewd District Councillors may even make use of these activities to discipline disloyal residents. In their study of the Mexican authoritarian state under the PRI, Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast find that the state would punish localities electing the opposition by cutting off their perks and privileges (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2003). We heard a similar story from a pro-establishment District Councillor, who confided that some pro-establishment District Councillors in the vicinity of his constituency threatened to end services offered to local residents who were simultaneously receiving giveaways from their political rivals.[17]

[14]The earmarked subsidy is worth about HK$3,200 million to be distributed among the eighteen districts (Home Affairs Department 2012a).

[15]During the financial year of 2014–2015, the provision for this program is HK$340 million for the eighteen District Councils.

[16]Personal interviews with District Councillors on January 2, 2013, and January 9, 2013, and January 23, 2013 (Code: 8, 14, and 17).

[17]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 3, 2013 (Code: 10).

Organizing all these activities requires significant financial resources. A common impression is that pro-establishment parties are good at delivering such activities because they are rich (Oriental Daily News 2011). This impression is not entirely accurate, as District Councillors do not always need to spend their own money organizing these activities. Many business corporations have a budget for the underprivileged in the community as part of their corporate social responsibility. For example, Towngas, a public utility company, formed a partnership with the District Councils to dispense more than 230,000 moon cakes to the elderly in 2010 (Towngas 2010). District Councillors can also apply for earmarked government funds, such as the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund, to finance community activities. The single most important resource that District Councillors need is perhaps labor, because they need helpers to hunt out corporate or government sponsorships and to assist the running of these activities. In this respect, pro-establishment parties no doubt enjoy a comparative advantage over the pan-democrats, not only because they have more party members but also because pro-Beijing social organizations may at times mobilize their members to assist these parties as voluntary workers.[18]

Because of the strategic importance of these social organizations, their nature and function deserve close attention. The formation of these organizations is usually based upon different social relationships, such as kinship, gender, occupation, class, education, and common interests. Examples include the Shatin Women's Association, North District Resident Association, and Hong Kong Taekwondo Action Association. They are officially registered as "charitable institutions," and they attract followers by providing members free or subsidized services, ranging from yoga classes and language courses to day care for kids and occupation training. Organizationally, they are led by a regional or city-level pro-Beijing association. For a list of these associations, see Table 5.2. Lo et al. (2002) point out that these organizations, together with their leading mass associations, assist pro-Beijing elements to penetrate into Hong Kong's society.

As shown in the table, these five leading mass associations expanded rapidly within a decade. For instance, the number of members of the New Territories Associations of Societies (NTAS) exceeded 210,000 in 2012 (Ming Pao Daily News 2013b). With the aid of 300 affiliated subsidiary organizations throughout the New Territories, it aimed to recruit 20,000 new members in 2013.

These social organizations play an important role in helping pro-Beijing incumbents build their social networks through co-organizing welfare or recreational activities. A common example is to distribute giveaways. A pro-establishment District Councillor of the New Territories area claimed that the NTAS has secured a stable supply of rice donation from some wealthy businessmen. As a pro-establishment District Councillor, he has been invited by the NTAS to allocate the

[18]I also heard that Chinese state-owned enterprises would send their Hong Kong workers to help Beijing-sponsored parties in elections.

Table 5.2 Pro-Beijing mass associations in Hong Kong

	Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU)	New Territories Associations of Societies (NTAS)	Kowloon Federation of Associations (KFA)	Hong Kong Island Federation of Associations (HKIF)	Federation of Guangdong Community Organizations (FHKGCO)
Founding Year	1947	1985	1997	1999	1996
Number of members in 2004	310,000	70,000	30,000	25,000	100,000
Number of affiliated organizations in 2004	173	128	43	121	179
Number of affiliated organizations in 2012	246	307	148	147	250
Target membership	Working class	Community groups in New Territories	Community groups in Kowloon	People and groups in Hong Kong Island	Guangdong communities in Hong Kong

Sources: Ma (2007a) and the homepage of these associations

rice to his constituents once in a few months.[19] Occasionally, these organizations even directly fund recreational activities organized by District Councillors.[20]

It is important to note that not all pro-establishment parties are able to benefit from the assistance of these mass associations. My interviewees from non-Beijing-sponsored pro-establishment parties lament that resources of these mass associations funnel only to Beijing-sponsored parties such as the DAB, although they may sometimes be invited to jointly host some local events with the mass associations.[21]

In addition to their direct help in organizing welfare and recreational activities, the mass associations also aid major pro-establishment parties by crowding out the pan-democrats in service provision. While District Councillors of all political stripes have an incentive to organize recreational activities for their constituents, local recreational facilities are always in short supply. Because many public facilities such as community halls are allocated based on casting lots, whether one can reserve a facility depends on how many other individuals are also interested in the same venue at the same time. In one of my interviews,[22] a prodemocracy District Councillor complained that the pro-establishment camp intentionally crowded him out by mobilizing numerous mass organizations to submit applications for public

[19]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 2, 2013 (Code: 9).

[20]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 2, 2013 (Code: 9).

[21]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 9, 2013 (Code: 13).

[22]Personal interview with a District Councillor on June 14, 2012 (Code: 2).

facilities all year round. A similar example is that the Tseung Kwan O Kai Fong Joint Association, a subordinate group of the NTAS, applied for a community hall to hold yoga classes along with seven friendly organizations under the NTAS (Ming Pao Daily News 2012a). Its application failed, but it managed to hold the classes in the facility anyway because one of those friendly organizations who had already successfully obtained the time slots passed the use right to this association.

A similar tactic has been applied to the competition for public funds. As mentioned, the District Councils have the power to allocate an earmarked government fund for community activities (Home Affairs Department 2012a). Similar to recreational facilities, the application for this fund is open to all social groups, but no group can be funded twice in a given year. As a result, social groups have sprung up all over the place in the past years. A DAB interviewee who chairs seven social organizations acknowledges that he mobilized every friendly organization to apply for this fund. Eventually, each organization received a subvention of around HK$8,000 in the financial year of 2012/2013.[23]

(b) Problem-solving

In her study of machine politics, Stokes highlights a quintessential voter-commitment problem that plagues clientelistic parties: how to ensure voters do not renege on the implicit deal where the party offers private benefits and the recipients vote for the party (Stokes 2005). Indeed, multiple pro-establishment District Councillors[24] point out that voters are becoming smarter, such that they would attend the pro-establishment camp's discounted banquet dinner today and join the day-trip organized by a pan-democratic District Councillor of a nearby neighborhood tomorrow.[25] For this reason, as pointed out by a number of pan-democratic District Councillors, welfare and recreational services alone are unable to win political support, despite the popular impression that the District Council politics is all about such trivial activities.

A more reliable way to win residents' support is to help them solve practical daily problems. The problems, or caseworks, that District Councillors have to handle include, but not limited to, family disputes, public bus rescheduling, applications for welfare allowances, building maintenance, and general legal consultation alike. A typical District Councillor of a public rental estate may receive from several hundreds to a thousand cases per year, depending on the neighborhood's demographic structure and how industrious the District Councillor is. By helping residents solve a problem, a District Councillor can build an intimate relationship with the residents, as the latter would identify the former not merely as a service provider but as a

[23] Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 2, 2013 (Code: 9).

[24] Personal interview with District Councillors on January 2, 2013, January 3, 2013, and January 23, 2013 (Code: 9, 10, and 17).

[25] This kind of indiscriminate consumption of party services may have been popularized by a slogan proposed by a radical pan-democratic party, the League of Social Democrats (LSD): "Enjoy the DAB's largess, Vote for the LSD."

friend or a trustworthy companion. One interviewee sees problem-solving this way, "Whether I can find a solution to the problem in hand is not really important. What is important is that you have walked through the difficult situation with the constituents."[26]

There are different ways to accomplish caseworks. But it is generally true that District Councillors are unable to solve a problem single-handedly, given the limited formal power they have. Oftentimes, they have to contact government authorities on behalf of the concerned residents to seek solutions. To what extent they can pressure government authorities depends on the political resources they are able to mobilize. Almost all pro-establishment parties have members occupying key government positions, such as the Executive Council.[27] Pro-establishment District Councillors concur that when these members step in, they would have an easy time pushing government officials to get the job done. "With their help," a pro-establishment District Councillor explains,[28] "even the head of a government department would come down to my district to listen to the residents."

This is not to say that all these District Councillors need to do is to give a phone call to a senior party member and let him handle the cases once and for all. In fact, they cannot abuse their senior party members' assistance by passing the buck all the time. District Councillors need to be selective and sometimes may need to learn how to package cases. A District Councillor told us that when he received a case from an individual resident, he would ask other residents if they encountered a similar problem.[29] If an individual problem can be packaged as a district-wise problem, then he can attract media attention and stand a good chance of getting government authorities to respond.

Of course, not all District Councillors are equally diligent. More sinister ways to market one's problem-solving ability do exist. Some pan-democratic District Councillors[30] reveal that one trick that their pro-establishment counterparts may use is to obtain insider information about local policies (e.g., the creation of a public park) that the government will soon implement.[31] Then, prior to the public announcement of such policies, these pro-establishment councillors would put up street banners telling residents that they are "negotiating" with government officials about those policies. Once the policies really come into effect, they can then

[26]Personal interview with a District Councillor on March 7, 2013 (Code: 23).

[27]The Basic Law stipulates that "[t]he Executive Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be an organ for assisting the Chief Executive in policy-making" (Hong Kong Government 2012). Thus, the Chief Executive consults the Executive Council before making a major decision in public policies (Li 2012).

[28]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 2, 2013 (Code: 7).

[29]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 23, 2013 (Code: 18).

[30]Personal interview with District Councillors on October 12, 2012, and March 7, 2013 (Code: 4 and 23).

[31]Thanks to their cozy relationship with the government, such insider information seems not too difficult to obtain.

claim all the credit, despite the fact that the policies would be carried out by the government anyway. A pan-democratic District Councillor even laments that a pro-establishment District Councillor from a nearby neighborhood was so audacious as to steal from him the credit for successfully pressing government authorities to install additional elevators in his housing estate by using such shenanigans.

5.4.2 Invading Rivals' Turf

To bring my analysis into focus, by political rivals, I refer to the pan-democrats. However, it is important to note that pro-establishment parties do compete with each other, and sometimes the competition is just as intense as that among the pan-democrats. The competition among pro-establishment parties often escapes media attention for two possible reasons. The first is that the frequency is relatively lower. Second, these parties try to conceal it for fear of condemnation by Beijing, which is intolerant of infighting among its political proxies.

(a) Newcomers' Actions

The aggressive expansion of Beijing-sponsored parties in the District Councils requires effective strategies to invade its rivals' turf, and effective strategies begin with locating an appropriate District Council Constituency. This is not a simple task because District Council Constituencies vary greatly according to their demographic structure, class composition, residents' dynamics, and, perhaps most importantly, the quality of the incumbent. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for different constituencies. For instance, some find neighborhood voluntary organizations such as Mutual Aid Committees critical to their electoral success (Kwong 2010, pp. 107–8), while others see them as an unreliable partner.[32] A potential challenger needs to identify a District Council Constituency that matches her ability and personality. DAB District Councillors admitted that they have received great help from the party in this because their party has a structured apprenticeship system,[33] in which mentors, usually seasoned politicians with ample local connections and street knowledge, offer valuable advice to newcomers on identifying constituencies.

What if different Beijing-sponsored parties have an eye on the same constituency? The leaders of Beijing-sponsored parties maintain private communication channels with each other to avoid territorial clashes. The Liaison Office also plays an important role in regulating electoral competition among pro-establishment parties. The bottom line is to resolve all conflicts within the pro-establishment camp before the election year (Au 2015), though this goal is not always achievable.

[32] In one interview, a District Councillor points out that precisely because Mutual Aid Committees are an important player in local affairs, if one relies too much on them, one may suffer a great electoral loss when they defect (Code: 20).

[33] Personal interview with District Councillors on January 2, 2012, and January 3, 2013 (Code: 8 and 11).

After identifying a suitable constituency, the next step is to penetrate it. Timing is of paramount importance. My interviewees suggest that in the 1990s, it was not uncommon that a challenger parachuted into a District Council Constituency just a couple of months before the election, then ran a campaign, and defeated the lazy incumbent. As elections have become increasingly competitive, incumbent Councillors these days dare not to slight their constituents. A pan-democratic District Councillor, who has occupied the job for almost two decades, recalls that District Councillors back in the 1990s might not even have a regular office, and it was perfectly acceptable that they met local residents once a week.[34]

"The situation now is totally different," he explains. "The constituents expect you to show up in office every single day."

As a result, now it is nearly impossible to unseat a pro-establishment incumbent with a person unfamiliar to the constituents. A typical newcomer from a pan-democratic party serious about District Council elections would penetrate into her target constituency one or two years prior to the election. As for Beijing-sponsored parties, there have been many cases where newcomers began their district works three years in advance. "Their election machine resumes as soon as an election is over," a seasoned prodemocracy politician observes.[35]

The first thing a newcomer needs to do is to gain publicity. I am told that an effective way to become known in the neighborhood is to greet residents in wet markets or in bus terminals during peak hours everyday. Newcomers would usually take that opportunity to distribute handbills, detailing some long-standing local issues such as sewage problems. The main point of such activities is to leave constituents an impression, however vague it is, that the newcomers are concerned about the well-being of the neighborhood and are extremely diligent.

The single most important task newcomers have to achieve in these preparation years is to forge a robust support network in the target neighborhood. The best way to attract followers is through services. They should start offering constituency services I discussed in the previous section as if they already held a District Council office. The problem is that without a formal position, in what capacity can they offer such services in order to achieve an effective result?

There are three common channels through which newcomers can deliver services. The first is that they work as assistant to an incumbent District Councillor or Legislative Councillor in a neighboring constituency and organize activities that encompass the residents of their target constituency. A pro-establishment District Councillor points out the limitation of this method.[36] "My assistant has already been overwhelmed by the work of my office. I do not think she has much time left for cultivating another constituency," he says.

Another channel is to deliver services as a community worker of the party. The DAB enjoys a superior competitive advantage in this regard. This party has been

[34]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 31, 2013 (Code: 21).

[35]Personal interview on April 11, 2014 (Code: 29).

[36]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 9, 2013 (Code: 13).

conscious of developing itself into a grassroots party with elaborate local networks since its establishment in 1992. In 1994, it had only nine local branches. By 2012, it has 46 local branch offices, in addition to more than a hundred LegCo and District Council offices (DAB 2013a). As a comparison, each of the two largest pan-democratic parties, the DP and the CP, only has five local branch offices. A DAB interviewee points out the importance of local branch offices during his election campaign.[37] He worked as a community worker in a local party branch, and he found that the proximity of the branch office has significantly lowered his logistic costs, thereby facilitating his services offered to his target constituency.

The third important channel to deliver service is through Beijing-sponsored social organizations. These social organizations help newcomers in a number of ways. A pan-democratic District Councillor[38] told us that as the 2011 District Council election neared, a women's organization affiliated with the NTAS launched a massive service blitz, involving recreational activities such as day-trips, dancing classes, and gift giving in his constituency. These activities were co-organized by a DAB member who ended up being his challenger in that election. He believed that these activities helped his challenger rapidly develop a local support network.

His conjecture is probably right. What a newcomer lacks is the constituents' contacts. This is where the social organizations as local community brokers can offer great help. These organizations reportedly pass the personal contacts of members who joined their welfare and recreational activities to pro-establishment parties for election campaigns (Lo et al. 2002; Ming Pao Daily News 2007). I heard a case where a resident received get-out-the-vote phone calls on election day from the teacher of an FTU yoga class that the resident had taken three years ago. One of my interviewees from the pro-establishment camp admitted that a women's organization affiliated with the NTAS did help him contact its members living in his district to solicit votes.[39] In his study of patron-client politics in District Council elections, Kwong (2010) observes similar electoral functions performed by a local women's organization in another district (pp. 106–107).

Au (2015) even points out that the pro-establishment camp has developed a "household registration" system (*hukou bu*) such that pro-establishment parties and organizations are required to submit a databank of residents' contacts that they collected through grassroots activities to the Liaison Office, who would coordinate the electoral campaign for the pro-establishment camp as a whole.

It is not uncommon that these social organizations provide office space for pro-establishment newcomers. One interviewee, an independent incumbent associated with the pan-democratic camp, told us that his pro-establishment rival, after being defeated, immediately opened an office next to his District Council office under the

[37]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 2, 2013 (Code: 8).

[38]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 23, 2013 (Code: 17).

[39]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 9, 2013 (Code: 13).

name of a social organization. With this official position, his rival engaged in district works as if he were the incumbent.[40]

(b) Newcomers' Incentives

Wars are fought by soldiers. Without party members who are willing to engage in mundane and routine district matters, Beijing-sponsored parties cannot execute any of the strategies mentioned earlier. In fact, the ability to attract newcomers is what I find as the most important manifestation of the pro-establishment camp's resource advantage. To understand this, one needs to know the evolution of government tiers in Hong Kong.

Prior to its sovereignty transfer, the Hong Kong government consisted of three elected tiers: the District Boards, the Urban Council/Regional Council,[41] and the Legislative Council. The District Boards were considered a career entry point for many junior politicians with aspirations. After accumulating experiences at the District-Board level, they hoped to get elected into the Urban Council/Regional Council. Given their larger constituency, greater policy-making power, and higher fiscal autonomy, the Urban Council/Regional Council would have further prepared these politicians for the ultimate trophy: the Legislative Council.

In 1999, the government carried out administrative reform, abolishing the two municipal councils. Junior politicians who occupied a District Council office suddenly found themselves stuck in an awkward situation. No matter how hard they worked for their tiny constituency, the political credentials and policy knowledge they accumulated over the years were by no means sufficient to prepare them for a LegCo election. In fact, their reputation could hardly travel beyond their tiny District Council Constituency. Worse still, the LegCo seats open for direct elections were limited, and many senior members, who had devoted themselves to the democracy movement since the 1980s, still occupied the LegCo office.[42]

Not all politicians have an ambition for the LegCo, however. For those who simply want to eke out a living from their District Council post, they are confronted with other problems. Chief among them is that the salary of a District Councillor is uncompetitive. Notwithstanding a recent pay raise, the monthly salary of a District Councillor is HK$22,090 in 2012–2013 (Legislative Council 2012), which is on a par with the wage of a junior secondary school teacher. Unlike school teachers, however, District Councillors have no opportunity of job promotion. Nor do they have statutory pay adjustment that civil servants enjoy. Lateral job transfers are also

[40] Personal interview with a District Councillor on June 14, 2012 (Code: 2).

[41] Both the Urban Council and the Regional Council were municipal councils in Hong Kong. While the former council dealt with municipal matters in Kowloon and Hong Kong Island, the latter council provided services for the New Territories.

[42] There are exceptions. Wu Chi Wai, of the DP, is one of the fortunate few, who, after waiting for 13 years as a District Councillor, saw an opportunity in 2012 when his senior retired from the LegCo. The party supported Wu by placing him as the first candidate on the only party list in his constituency. He eventually won a LegCo seat for the first time at the age of 50.

difficult, given that the skill set they have developed does not appeal to private sector employers.[43] District Councillors are also excluded from the Mandatory Provident Fund, a pension system to which all employees in Hong Kong are entitled. In brief, almost all District Councillor interviewees find their job financially unrewarding in the long run. As a result, many have to look for a part-time job, such as being a social worker[44] or a college instructor,[45] to make ends meet.

The meager salary, dismal career prospect, and reelection uncertainties greatly discourage junior politicians from starting their career at the District Council level. In my interviews, many political parties have a difficult time looking for newcomers to stand for District Council elections. Yet this problem is less of a concern to major pro-establishment parties such as the DAB.

Thanks to its unparalleled war chest for party development, the DAB is able to assign full-time paid jobs to its junior members who aspire to compete for District Council seats. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in language education, Wong Ping Fan was hired as an assistant coordinator with a monthly salary of HK$15,000 (Ming Pao Daily News 2010b). Her job duty was to provide community services such as free haircut in her target constituency, Bik Woo. The two-year intensive grassroots services had prepared her for the 2011 District Council election, in which she lost by a slim margin. One of our interviewees from the DAB had had a similar career path except that she successfully unseated a longtime pan-democratic incumbent in the same election.[46]

Beijing-sponsored parties' financial assistance to newcomers may continue even after their electoral success. A pro-establishment interviewee tells me that his friend, who is a District Councillor of the DAB, continues to receive a monthly salary of HK$11,000 for his part-time position in the party.[47] Chan Hok Fung, another DAB District Councillor, reportedly earned a monthly salary of HK$11,500 for working as the assistant of a LegCo member of his party (Ming Pao Daily News 2013a). Together with his District Council salary, his monthly income would be over HK$33,000. It is also worth noting that the DAB no longer requires their District Councillors to make a monthly contribution to the party (Yuen 2011, p. 40), while pan-democratic parties would top slice 5–10 % of their District Councillors' monthly salaries.

This financial arrangement explains why major pro-establishment parties can continue to field newcomers for District Council elections. If party members win, they can keep their salary as party employees. If they lose, they can go back to work as a full-time employee in the party or in affiliated social organizations. "In

[43] Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 23, 2013 (Code: 17).

[44] Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 9, 2013 (Code: 13).

[45] Personal interview with a District Councillor on June 15, 2012 (Code: 3).

[46] Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 2, 2013 (Code: 7).

[47] Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 9, 2013 (Code: 13).

the worst case, I can be an instructor for FTU's employee retraining programs in case of losing the election," says an interviewee from the FTU.[48]

In contrast, candidates of the prodemocracy camp seldom enjoy such a luxury. Many prodemocracy parties have difficulties supporting not only defeated candidates but even incumbents who seek reelection. It is reported that a candidate from the DP had to sell his own apartment, in order to raise sufficient funds for running the 2008 LegCo elections (Ming Pao Daily News 2010c). Many of my pan-democratic interviewees have to keep not only a part-time job but also to pursue further studies to maintain their competitiveness in the labor market.[49] To pan-democratic District Councillors, they are fully aware that once defeated, they can count on no one but themselves.

In addition to monetary rewards and career safety nets, Beijing-sponsored parties, with their cozy relationship with the government, can offer their junior members an alternative career path in the public sector. Chan Hak Kan of the DAB is a case in point (Ming Pao Daily News 2011b). He started his political career by winning a District Council seat in 1999. After losing his office in the 2003 elections, the government appointed him as a special assistant to the Chief Executive in 2006, with a monthly salary of around HK$70,000. Another example is Chan Pak Li (Information Services Department 2013). He started his political career by running for the 2007 District Council elections as a DAB candidate. After landslide victories in two successive elections, he was appointed as a political assistant for the Commerce and Economic Development in March 2013, with a monthly salary of around HK$98,000.

The effort of Beijing-sponsored parties in developing its grassroots networks aims to diminish the political influences of the pan-democrats. As we have seen in Table 5.1, it has achieved resounding success at least at the District Council level. Its past success will also make future success more likely. With more seats under its control, it can focus more resources in the remaining constituencies it has yet to capture. In addition, there exists a complementarity effect regarding service provision among constituencies. A pro-establishment District Councillor describes how he and nearby District Councillors of the same party work as a team:[50] "Two of them have legal backgrounds. Together with my expertise in district matters, we have nicely complemented each other's work." If he cannot attend a meeting with local residents, another teammate would show up on his behalf even if the teammate comes from another constituency. "The key is," he emphasizes, "we make the constituents feel that the party is always at their service."

[48]Personal interview with a District Councillor on December 18, 2012 (Code: 6).

[49]Personal interview with District Councillors on June 15, 2012, and October 12, 2012 (Code: 3 and 4).

[50]Personal interview with a District Councillor on January 4, 2013 (Code: 12).

5.4.3 *Candidate Selection*

The strength of Beijing-sponsored parties is reflected in the candidates whom they field in District Council elections. Figure 5.2 offers a glimpse of candidate attributes according to political camp. Since 2003, the average age of Beijing-backed candidates (solid line) has gone down. At the same time, the share of female candidates of these parties has consistently been on the rise. There is no noticeable trend with respect to both age and gender for pan-democratic parties.

A remarkable achievement for pan-democratic parties is its use of novice candidates, defined as those who did not participate in the last election. Its share of novice candidates (dashed line) has increased from 31.5 % in 2003 to almost 50 % in 2011 (see the bottom left panel of Fig. 5.2). Note, however, novelty is not tantamount to quality. Equally noticeable is the appalling decline in the success rate of these pan-democratic novices, dropping from 52 % in 2003 to 6 % in 2011. By contrast, although no drastic change is observed among Beijing-sponsored parties in the share of novice candidates between 2003 and 2011, they have significantly raised the election rate of their new candidates from 8 to 44.5 % (see the bottom right panel of Fig. 5.2).

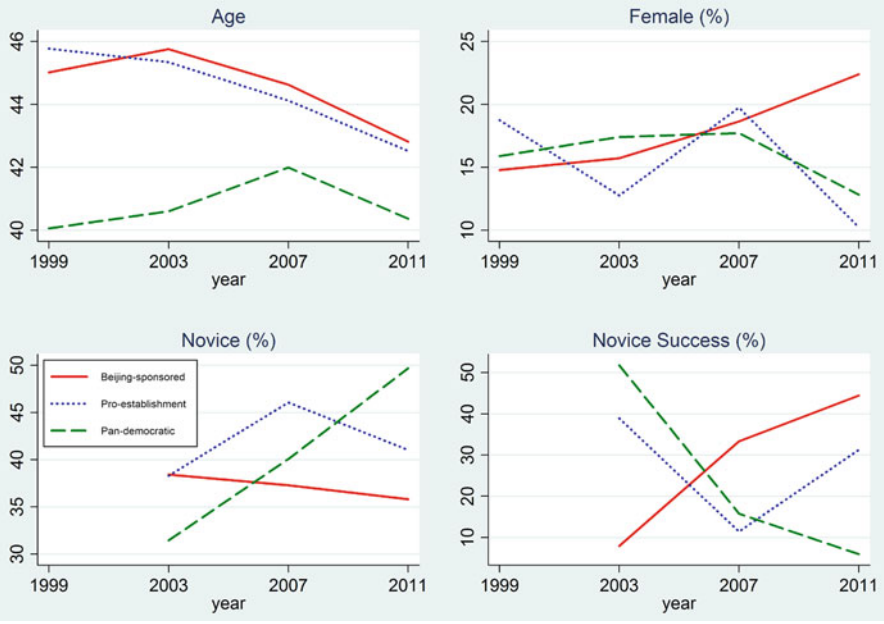

Fig. 5.2 Attributes of District Council candidates by political camp. Notes: "Novice" is defined as candidates who did not participate in the last District Council election. Pro-establishment parties here do not include Beijing-sponsored parties (Source: Author's calculation based on election data from the HKSAR Electoral Affairs Commission)

A crucial reason why Beijing-sponsored parties do not endorse so many novices is that they are able to keep junior candidates working in a district despite initial defeat. One-time loss cannot tell much about the long-run potential of a politician. But the experience of defeat is an important asset to junior politicians, who can grow skillful through past mistakes. In addition, the relationship vote takes time to develop. For this reason, given that they have ample resources to invest in younger members, Beijing-sponsored parties can afford hiring defeated candidates to continue to work in a district. Pan-democratic parties, on the other hand, have difficulty retaining defeated candidates due to the lack of funding. Once defeated, many pan-democratic candidates would end up dropping out permanently. Consequently, pan-democratic parties would have to find many inexperienced new faces for every election cycle.

To examine the discrepancy in the ability to retain talents between Beijing-sponsored parties and the pan-democrats, I conduct probit regression analyses to find out correlates of District Council challengers'[51] dropout decisions based on the election data from 1999 to 2011.[52] In particular, for each political camp, I regress the outcome variable *dropout* on numerous relevant factors.[53] The regression results are presented in Table 5.3.

First, consider the variable *Novice*. The coefficient has a positive sign in both samples, suggesting that new candidates are more likely to drop out of the subsequent election than seasoned candidates. However, the coefficient on this variable is not significantly different from zero in the Beijing-sponsored parties' sample. But as for the pan-democratic sample, the coefficient is both statistically and substantively significant. Converting the probit coefficient (0.448) into probability, I find that the probability for defeated pan-democratic novices to quit a subsequent election is 16 % points, higher than defeated pan-democratic veterans.

Next, consider the effect of *Vote Share*. One would expect that a challenger defeated by a narrow margin is less likely to opt out of the next election. In other words, the probability of dropping out should be negatively associated with a defeated candidate's vote share. Indeed, the data support this theoretical expectation, as the coefficient on *Vote Share* is negative across all specifications. Note that in the pan-democratic sample, the effect of vote share is no longer statistically significant once we control for *Novice*. This may imply that those who received a low vote share in the pan-democratic camp are predominantly inexperienced candidates.

In theory, elderly challengers who are defeated are more likely to opt out. This is true with respect to the Beijing-sponsored sample, as the coefficient on *Age* is statistically significant in Specifications (1) and (2). On average, the probability that a defeated Beijing-sponsored candidate would drop out of the next election increases

[51] A District Council challenger refers to a candidate who is not a District Council incumbent.

[52] The 2011 District Council election data are used to identify dropouts from 2007. One cannot tell whether a 2011 candidate will drop out until the 2015 election.

[53] The outcome variable is a dichotomous variable that takes a value of "1" if a defeated challenger opts out of the following election and "0" otherwise.

Table 5.3 Probit estimates of challengers' dropout by political camp

	Beijing-sponsored parties' dropout		Pan-democratic parties' dropout	
Dependent variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Novice		0.085		0.448*
		(0.256)		(0.244)
Vote share	-0.027***	-0.023*	-0.019**	-0.007
	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Age	0.030***	0.044***	0.011	0.014
	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.011)
Female	-0.105	-0.271	0.303	0.252
	(0.230)	(0.293)	(0.225)	(0.273)
Female incumbent	0.152	0.013	0.222	0.535*
	(0.225)	(0.281)	(0.225)	(0.281)
Age of incumbent	-0.016*	-0.038***	0.003	-0.006
	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Pan-democratic incumbent	-0.382*	-0.615**		
	(0.199)	(0.263)		
Novice incumbent	0.049	-0.108	0.110	0.081
	(0.256)	(0.275)	(0.277)	(0.305)
Beijing-sponsored incumbent			0.092	0.019
			(0.167)	(0.214)
Constant	1.403**	2.230**	0.685	4.481***
	(0.707)	(1.078)	(0.671)	(0.948)
N	308	206	284	184
AIC	390.22	261.31	417.66	277.83

Notes: A "dropout" challenger is one who chooses not to compete in the following District Council election given that he or she is defeated in the current District Council election. The dependent variable is a dichotomous variable that takes a value of "1" if a defeated candidate drops out of the subsequent election and "0" otherwise. All specifications control for district and year fixed effects, which are not reported. The data cover District Council elections from 1999 to 2011. Standard errors clustered at candidate level are in parentheses
*<0.10; **<0.05; ***<0.01

by 1.2 % points for each additional year in age. Surprisingly, no significant age effect can be found in the pan-democratic sample. My conjecture is that Beijing-sponsored parties have a certain mechanism to retire senior candidates, especially after their defeats, in order to make room for younger and more promising candidates.

Whether a defeated challenger decides to strike back depends on the incumbent's quality. There is a wealth of literature in American politics that studies how high-quality incumbents are able to deter strong challengers (e.g., Stone et al. 2004). For this reason, I also control for incumbents' gender, age, and political affiliation in the probit regression specifications. There is no compelling evidence suggesting that gender matters. But an incumbent's age is negatively correlated with a defeated

challenger's dropout decision. A possible reason is that it is relatively easier to unseat elderly incumbents, which makes defeated candidates willing to spend four more years in a district waiting for their next chance.

Finally, for Beijing-sponsored parties, their defeated challengers are more likely to stay if the incumbent is a pan-democrat. The effect is of both statistical and substantive significance. Take the coefficient on *Pan-democratic Incumbent* as an example. The probability that a Beijing-sponsored defeated candidate would opt out of the next election is 17 % points lower if the incumbent happens to come from a pan-democratic party. This result indicates the conscious aggression of Beijing-sponsored parties on the turf of the pan-democrats. The converse is not true, however. For pan-democratic parties, whether the incumbent comes from a Beijing-sponsored party has little to do with a defeated candidate's dropout decision.

Taking all these together, one can see that Beijing-sponsored parties have a more structured, comprehensive, and organized electoral strategy than their pan-democratic counterparts. They have an established system to protect defeated novices and to retire less competitive senior candidates. Their attack is also more targeted, as they are able to have their defeated candidates to base in the same district to gnaw away at the support of pan-democratic incumbents.

When I asked the pan-democratic District Councillors how they feel about the aggressive expansion of Beijing-sponsored parties in the District Councils, all of them agreed that the effective organizational capacity and superior resource advantage of their rivals have posed a serious threat to the survival of the pan-democratic camp. The majority of them held that the political outlook of their camp was bleak. A couple of them even suggested that an electoral turnaround would only be possible when the pro-establishment camp completely wipes out the pan-democrats. "At that point, voters may yearn for a wholesale change," comments one interviewee.[54]

Perhaps such a turnaround will happen one day. Perhaps the pan-democrats will experience another July 1, 2003 protest that would help them drive the pro-establishment parties out of the District Councils. However even if that day really comes, the pan-democrats' victory is going to be short-lived, if the structural weaknesses of pan-democratic parties as detailed in this chapter remain unchanged. In this sense, my interviewee's hope seems unrealistic at best and defeatist at worst.

5.5 "Independent" Candidates

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the CCP has long established its branch in Hong Kong, although its membership has been shrouded in secrecy. Concealing party identity helps CCP members avoid getting into political trouble and achieve various strategic objectives. Would candidates from Beijing-sponsored

[54] Personal interview with a District Councillor on March 7, 2013 (Code: 23).

parties also hide their local party affiliation when they compete for District Council seats? One incentive in doing so is to avoid invoking voters' negative feelings about these parties. Although ideology plays a relatively small role in District Council elections, implying that party labels are less important, there exist numerous anecdotal accounts of this practice (Ming Pao Daily News 2012b; Apple Daily 2012b). Such candidates are commonly referred to as "invisible leftists" (*yinxing zuopai*).

Some pan-democratic District Councillors whom I interviewed have also shared their experience of dealing with these "invisible leftists." But a more intriguing personal encounter I heard came from a pro-establishment District Councillor, whose party is not Beijing-sponsored. He confided that a major Beijing-sponsored party had long been anxious to unseat him, although he also belonged to the pro-establishment camp. But it could not do it openly because, as I mentioned previously, Beijing generally disapproves of infighting within the pro-establishment camp.[55] "To escape Beijing's attention," explains the District Councillor, "my challengers first quit their party prior to an election and ran their campaign under an independent label. But they would rejoin the party after I beat them." He has survived such an attack twice. His experience suggests not only an alternative incentive to hide one's political affiliation but also the keen competition within the pro-establishment camp, which often escapes media attention.

5.6 Redistricting

A number of pan-democratic District Councillors whom I have interviewed lament that they have been under constant threat of gerrymandering. Gerrymandering refers to an electoral trick of redrawing district boundaries in order to maximize one's electoral chance. This electoral practice, or malpractice, has been observed in many countries, especially those adopting a "single-member district" electoral formula (Handley and Grofman 2008). Studies on gerrymandering in Hong Kong are woefully inadequate because official data on the government's redistricting policies remain opaque. In principle, the boundary of a district should be redrawn in order to have the district conform to an official population quota (approximately 17,000 people per District Council Constituency).[56] The implementation of the population quota is rather lax. The law allows the Electoral Affairs Commission, the government agency responsible for redistricting, to deviate from the population

[55]Exposing elite dissension would reveal the weakness of the ruling coalition and encourage the emergence of challenges from society. This was one of the factors leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dimitrov 2013, p. 310). Perhaps for this reason, the CCP has tried painstakingly to maintain an image of elite cohesion.

[56]For detailed criteria of redistricting in Hong Kong, see Section 20 of the Electoral Affairs Commission Ordinance (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government 2013).

quota by as much as ±25 %. In addition, the bandwidth, albeit sufficiently lax, is also nonbinding. The commission can ignore the population quota altogether on the grounds of "preserving community identity and local ties" (Electoral Affairs Commission 2011), where the terms "community identity" and "local ties" are vaguely defined.

Perhaps for the above reasons, there is no shortage of bizarrely shaped District Council Constituencies. Some pan-democratic District Councillors I have interviewed also suggest that they could not really understand why their districts appear the way they are. What they knew was that they suddenly lost a sizable portion of their constituents because the Electoral Affairs Commission claimed that their districts needed redrawing. Some tried to file a complaint to the commission, asking for a revocation of the redistricting plan, but to no avail. The authorities explained to them that they were responding to suggestions from citizens who requested redistricting. One pan-democratic District Councillor elaborates on this point, saying, "The pro-establishment camp would mobilize their people to file such redistricting requests to the authorities in order to undermine pan-democratic incumbents." I was curious why he did not do likewise. "Because the authorities would not respond to my requests," he sighs.

The uneasiness of my pan-democratic interviewees is understandable. Gelman and King (1994) argue that incumbents are generally averse to redistricting because it "creates enormous levels of uncertainty, an extremely undesirable situation for any sitting politician (p. 541)." Redistricting uproots the constituents whom a District Councillor has served for years and replaces them with someone unfamiliar with the District Councillor's achievement and diligence. Worse still, redistricting in Hong Kong typically occurs only a few months prior to an election. For instance, in 2003 and 2011, the Electoral Affairs Commission announced the redistricting plan six to seven months before the elections, regardless of the statutory deadline prescribed by Section 18 of the Electoral Affairs Commission Ordinance which requires the Commission to make the boundary delimitation recommendations no later than twelve months before an election. With such a short notice, affected incumbents would find it difficult to build connections with their new constituents.

To verify if a systematic bias exists against pan-democratic District Councillors with respect to redistricting, I contacted various government agencies including the Electoral Affairs Commission and the Lands Department for redistricting data. In particular, I wanted to find out the District Council Constituency to which each residential building belongs in each District Council election. Such data are necessary because the extent of redistricting varies significantly from constituency to constituency. To evaluate the systematic bias more accurately, if any, I needed to measure not only the occurrence but also the intensity of redistricting for each District Council Constituency. Quite surprisingly, the government authorities replied that such data are not available. What they could offer me was a set of digital maps that show the demarcation of District Council Constituencies since 2003.

As a result, I had to use a more complicated way to collect the desired data. I took advantage of the fact that for each residential building, its physical location does not change from one election to another. What may change is its District Council

Table 5.4 District change of residential buildings by political camp

	$t+1$			
t	Pan-democratic parties	Beijing-sponsored parties	Others	Total (%)
Pan-democratic parties	83.02	1.42	15.56	100
Beijing-sponsored parties	1.32	96.49	2.2	100
Others	2.56	1.53	95.91	100

Notes: The unit of observations is the percentage of residential buildings. The transition matrix shows the percentage change of residential buildings from one political camp to another between time t and $t+1$. The data are based on three District Council elections: 2003, 2007, and 2011. Beijing-sponsored parties include the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), and the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance (HKPA)

Constituency. If I can collect the geo-coordinates of residential buildings, I can then map these geo-coordinates to the District Council Constituency maps, which would allow me to figure out the change of district identity of these buildings.

Using the above method, I ended up identifying approximately 38,000 residential buildings' geo-coordinates, housing 1.98 million apartment units. Because Hong Kong has 2.3 million domestic households (Hong Kong Housing Authority 2012), the dataset covers approximately 84 % of the total household population. The data are not perfect but should provide a reasonably decent estimate of the potential redistricting bias.

Table 5.4 presents a transition matrix, which shows the percentage change of residential buildings from one political camp to another between elections. For instance, pan-democratic parties can carry over 83.02 % of the residential buildings in their districts to the next election. However, Beijing-sponsored parties can retain 96.49 %, which is significantly higher. In fact, even the "Others" category, which consists of other pro-establishment parties and "independent" candidates, is able to hold 95.91 % of the buildings in their districts unchanged. In short, a District Council Constituency controlled by a pan-democratic party has on average 4.86 times more buildings being subject to redistricting than a constituency controlled by a Beijing-sponsored party. The findings provide prima facie evidence to support the conjecture of the pan-democratic District Councillors I interviewed: pan-democratic District Councillors are more likely to fall prey to redistricting, which disrupts their ties with the constituents and hence lowers their chance of getting reelected.

Pan-democratic District Councillors are not completely defenseless, however, in the face of the redistricting risk. A number of them say that they have to provide constituency services not only to residents of their constituencies but also to those living in neighboring ones, so that when redistricting really occurs, the newly added constituents, who are likely residents of neighboring constituencies, would also be familiar with their work. But making a wider web of influence is costly. As mentioned, pan-democratic District Councillors are already facing tremendous financial constraints. Suffice it to say, redistricting would not make their political life and survival easier. Rather, it is likely to compound their plight.

5.7 Conclusion

Grassroots political organizations only get a brief mention in the Basic Law. Article 97 stipulates that "[d]istrict organizations which are not organs of political power may be established in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, to be consulted by the government of the Region on district administration and other affairs, or to be responsible for providing services in such fields as culture, recreation and environmental sanitation." Although district organizations are supposedly apolitical, as provided by this article, District Councils, ironically, turn out to be a powerful political tool for Beijing-sponsored parties to challenge the dominant position of the opposition parties. By driving the opposition parties out of District Councils, Beijing-sponsored parties have effectively deprived their rivals of a vital source of financial incomes. Losing local elected offices also implies losing local contacts. Beijing-sponsored parties would be able to uproot their rivals' grassroots political networks.

Thus far, their encroachment on their rivals' turf has been fairly successful. Despite a temporary setback in 2003, as a consequence of the historic July 1, 2003 protest, the Beijing-sponsored parties' dominance over the District Councils has risen unambiguously. This result indicates that the July 1, 2003 protest did not disrupt Beijing's long-term political planning in Hong Kong. On the contrary, Beijing-sponsored parties have redoubled their efforts to consolidate their united front work at the grassroots level (Qiang 2008, p. 185).

A DAB District Councillor points out that the political crisis in 2003 was a wake-up call. "It shows that we lacked a sense of crisis," he explains, "We need to strengthen our district work." Another DAB District Councillor, who is also a member of the party's central committee, confided to me that the DAB invested "at least twice as many resources in grassroots work after 2003." Note that the escalation of investment in united front work is probably not confined to Beijing-sponsored parties. Kwong (2010) finds that a pro-Beijing women's center had also received a huge sum of money from its patrons after the July 1, 2003 protest. The money was used to offer recreational and cultural activities at a discount rate to local residents. Conceivably, this kind of local initiatives is part of Beijing's overarching strategic plan of marginalizing the pan-democrats' social support through the use of vertical patron-client networks.

The enormous united front investment explains the inexorable rise of Beijing-sponsored parties in the District Councils. They enjoy a superior resource advantage over pan-democratic parties. Such an advantage allows them to not only provide highly labor-intensive constituency services but also to cushion the impact of electoral defeats. In addition, political ideology plays little role in District Council elections, which implies that Beijing-sponsored parties can avoid dealing with the ideological confrontation mounted by the opposition that occurs in higher-level elections.

Redistricting may also contribute to the success of Beijing-sponsored parties' District Council strategy. As I have shown in Table 5.4, redistricting occurs with a

significantly higher frequency in District Council Constituencies controlled by the pan-democratic District Councillors than those controlled by the pro-establishment camp. The District Councillors whom I have interviewed all agree that redistricting has devastating impacts on their chances of getting reelected because it can sever their ties with the constituents whom they have been serving for years.

The ambition of Beijing-sponsored parties will likely not just be confined to the District Councils. Ultimately, they aim to outflank their pan-democratic rivals in the LegCo, the major battlefield. Does their District Council strategy help them in trying to achieve this larger goal? This is what we will examine in the next chapter.