

COMMENTHK

LegCo election will reshape SAR’s political landscape

Chow Pak-chin says that the new lawmakers must look beyond their constituencies at the big picture



After the ups and downs of the past year, the upcoming Legislative Council election — postponed from 2020 — may very well reshape the political landscape of Hong Kong.

With our amended and improved electoral system, we can be sure that only patriots with Hong Kong’s best interests at heart will have seats in the legislature from now on. At present, only one candidate has been disqualified in the vetting process, leaving 153 candidates vying for 90 seats.

As a member of the medical profession, I am naturally more concerned with the constituency overseeing Hong Kong’s medical and health services, which is the most fiercely contested functional constituency, with five candidates fighting for just one seat.

The disqualified candidate, Lau Tsz-chun, also happened to be with this constituency. He is a registered nurse who was disqualified because he works for the government part time, which is against election rules. The candidates for this seat are: Chan Chi-Chung, Chan Wing-kwong, Pong Oi-lan, David Lam Tzit-yuen, and Ho Sung-hon. These candidates represent a wide range of subsectors in this constituency, including nurses, traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, pharmacists and registered medical practitioners.

Despite the fierce competition, thankfully, mudslinging and other dirty tactics have not been deployed by any of the five candidates, or for that matter by any of the 153 hopefuls who are running, at least not yet.

It is also hoped that the candidates who finally take up the seats in LegCo will do so not on empty promises and catchy slogans but with a clear platform, flair, dedication to serving the public, and perhaps most importantly, integrity.

And after the chaos of the last two and a half years, a civilized campaign is just the stability that the city and its people are craving. We need patriots to run Hong Kong, not rebels and renegades who would rather see Hong Kong burn. Similarly, we do not need LegCo members who go for personal glory or for the handsome financial remuneration.



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While I am also concerned about the turnout on election day, I am at the same time pragmatic. A survey this month indicated a record low level of voter enthusiasm. I can only hope that on election day, the people of Hong Kong realize how important this election is for the city’s future.

If this upcoming election is to create the impact that Hong Kong requires, then local and government organizations need to drum up support and engagement within the community. But I am also pragmatic in that we need not worry too much about low turnouts. Many local elections in Western countries have turnout rates of around 30 percent. So long as voters who want to vote have easy access to their ballots, we should be fine.

And looking past the election and toward the next four years, I am anxious to see what will be achieved in this upcoming term.

The previous two terms were marred by fiscal squandering, filibustering, violent anti-government protests, and other immature antics. In short, the legislative members of the last two terms have been a letdown for the people of Hong Kong. The construction program of hospitals was delayed due to endless filibustering. And as expected, a lack of vital hospitals — nay, even modern hospitals — put untold strain on the city’s healthcare during flashpoints of the pandemic.

The requirements under Article 23 of the Basic Law must also be passed into local law, as these requirements are not, and reasonably so, covered by the National Security Law for Hong Kong. For example, the latter does expressly prohibit acts of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with external forces, but it does not cover treason, sedition, and theft of state secrets.

As Deng Xiaoping said, “Love China, love Hong Kong.” And this is the code by which our next term of patriotic legislators ought to abide. Deng went on to say the following when defining a patriot: “A patriot is one who respects the Chinese nation,

sincerely supports the motherland’s resumption of sovereign rule over Hong Kong, and wishes not to impair Hong Kong’s prosperity and stability. ...We don’t demand that they be in favor of China’s socialist system; we ask only for them to love the motherland and Hong Kong.”

These are simple and basic expectations for a true patriot, and we can only hope that this term of lawmakers will accordingly prove their worth and integrity over the next four years.

But it goes without saying that patriotism requires sacrifice. Some legislators choose to retain their employment in addition to their LegCo duties. That’s been a common practice so far, but it means that their LegCo membership will be a part-time job. Today, being a legislator is a full-time, or some might even say, more than a full-time role. Will this upcoming term of legislators be able to step up to the plate? After all, I have the sense that many candidates’ present salaries are lower than what they will get from being a LegCo member.

Further, members of the new LegCo should also broaden their outlook. Let’s look at the recent TV debate of the accounting sector. Although the candidates were composed and conducted themselves well, they merely focused on issues within their own sector and area of expertise. While every issue and every sector of Hong Kong is an integral cog within a working machine, we need our legislators to represent the whole of Hong Kong and not just their own professions.

And if we are to put Hong Kong back on its feet again, and Hong Kong probably will continue to be under various levels of stress from time to time, we need a wide range of expertise and greater cohesion among our LegCo members, not only among them in the LegCo chamber, but also between them and the people of Hong Kong. While I am anxious to see what the next four years may bring us, I am also excited by the potential that can come with a new set of patriotic, capable, dedicated and selfless LegCo members. I encourage all our readers who are registered voters to vote on Dec 19.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Oline
Scan the code to see the list of 2021 LegCo election candidates

Golden chances in store for foreign businesses

The Census and Statistics Department’s latest report on foreign companies operating in Hong Kong says the number of regional headquarters operated by US companies in the special administrative region has fallen to 254 this year, from 282 for the same period last year, while those of Japanese enterprises has gone down to 210 from 226.

While these figures may arouse concern for Hong Kong, it would be alarmist to conclude that the city has lost its attractiveness to foreign capital.

The “black revolution” in 2019 had severely threatened law and order in Hong Kong, and contributed to the decline in the number of foreign companies with headquarters in Hong Kong. The number fell to 1,504 last year after peaking at 1,541 in 2019, according to the report. After all, uncertainty is considered the biggest risk for business operations.

The months-long violent anti-government campaign forced Beijing to take decisive action by promulgating the National Security Law for Hong Kong in mid-2020. In a knee-jerk reaction, some foreign companies got worried. However, a year after the National Security Law was enacted, expatriates and foreign businesses no longer doubt the purpose of the law — it’s merely intended to crack down on anti-China proxies in Hong Kong and activities that endanger national security, and no foreign company has been affected in any way. Rather, the National Security Law, along with the city’s improved electoral system implemented this year, has effectively eliminated forces that are detrimental to Hong Kong’s stability, and created a much healthier political environment that’s conducive to business. It also marks the beginning of Hong Kong’s transition from chaos to order and good governance.

One should assess Hong Kong’s business environment based on China’s national policy instead of the temporary changes in the city. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized that the central government’s commitment to “one country, two systems” will not change or waver. In other words, ensuring Hong Kong’s long-term stability remains a fundamental principle of national policy. This is the very reason behind Beijing’s moves to help the HKSAR government end the 2019 social unrest. These measures, including the promulgation of the National Security Law and the electoral revamp, have created a much better business environment with political and social stability restored and lower risks for businesses to operate.

Hong Kong is now not only back on track but can also offer unprecedented opportunities for economic development. The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) fully demonstrates the central government’s staunch support



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for Hong Kong in enhancing its status as an international hub for finance, transportation, aviation, trade, legal and dispute resolution, high-end services, innovation and technology, as well as cultural exchanges and arts. Not only will Hong Kong further consolidate its existing competitive edges, but will also be given abundant space to tap into many new industries.

Hong Kong has entered a new era in which its development will synchronize with that of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The proposed development of the northern New Territories — the Northern Metropolis — has drawn great public attention as it will facilitate Hong Kong’s further integration into the Greater Bay Area. This would eventually create a development pattern that excels in finance in the south of the city and innovation in the north, with the advantages complementing each other. The Northern Metropolis, which encompasses the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park in the Lok Ma Chau Loop, would morph into an innovation and technology corridor that would resemble a miniature “Silicon Valley”. With innovation in the driver’s seat, there’ll be no shortage of reputable global enterprises that will work with Hong Kong’s higher institutions in procuring the finest IT talents and innovative resources from overseas. A pool of talents and resources will, undoubtedly, help to unleash the huge development potential of Hong Kong, presenting golden opportunities for ambitious companies to expand their global footprints.

Such favorable conditions have been observed by some discerning entrepreneurs. According to the Census and Statistics Department’s latest report, the number of United Kingdom firms with regional headquarters in Hong Kong has rebounded to 138 so far this year — an increase of about 5 percent year-on-year. Chinese mainland enterprises are among the most robust, with the number of their regional headquarters in Hong Kong having gone up by some 6 percent year-on-year to 252 in 2021 to date. Conceivably, no ambitious firm with sound judgment would overlook Hong Kong’s advantages as a place for setting up a regional base.

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Scaling new heights in cross-border scientific collaboration

I’ve been at the University of Hong Kong for nearly seven years as an Australian astrophysicist and space scientist in the Department of Physics. Over this period, I’ve seen some very challenging times, not least the 2019 violent social unrest that also engulfed our normally quiet institution of higher learning and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, I’ve also seen a significant and very encouraging increase in the opportunities on the Chinese mainland now available to Hong Kong-based scientists and technologists. This is helpful and timely to our top universities as they offer fresh avenues to partner and collaborate with our often more-generously-funded mainland counterparts. This gives me much hope and encouragement for a brighter research future. It’s an inspiration and motivator for common endeavors and promises to unlock more of our potential in science and technology by leveraging the resources, facilities and capable partners now within our reach.

Scientific and technological cooperation with the mainland is happening more regularly and in ever more diverse, exciting and sophisticated ways to mutual benefit. This provides for enhanced progress as our communities work more closely together than ever before. Facilitation of this growth in working together is via new, generous, joint funding programs for combined and coordinated efforts. This includes the new joint initiative of the Croucher Foundation and the Chinese Academy of Sciences under the CAS-Croucher Funding Scheme for Joint Laboratories as a recent example. Such a positive, much-welcomed initiative comes with the opening up of both



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Hong Kong and Macao-based researchers to direct access to the National Key R&D programs available through the Ministry of Science and Technology. This is a highly significant development, implemented over the last few years, that has already led to some important Hong Kong-led research successes. These various programs are very valuable additions to the more traditional university research funding programs offered by the HKSAR government under its own University Grants Council.

I believe these emerging opportunities for HK-based scientists are directly related to China’s rapid emergence as a major science power with demonstrated capacity in technology, innovation and basic science. This is evident in the increasing number of patents emanating from China over the last few years that now significantly exceed those from the United States, Japan and Europe. A recent paper (Sun & Cao 2021) put at least part of this success down to “a grand experiment” that the Chinese government began about 15 years ago as part of the 2006-20 National Medium and Long-Term Plan for the Development of

Science and Technology, that was intended to turn China into an innovation-focused country. To my mind, they seem well on the way to achieving this in at least several key areas, such as AI and quantum computing. One only has to look figuratively and literally “up” at all the successes in the last couple of years in my area of space science that clearly demonstrates capacity, innovation and achievement — just think of the Chinese moon and Mars rovers and the new Chinese space station. While on the ground, the commissioning of “FAST” — the world’s largest single-dish radio telescope — has impressed astronomers, just as the American equivalent and previously the world’s largest, collapsed spectacularly in Puerto Rico this year from neglect and lack of funds. As an interested and objective observer with no axe to grind, this rise and fall of two enormous single-dish radio telescopes encapsulated for me an interesting moment of contrast.

Just this week, we received our first scientific data from the FAST telescope from our mainland-based colleagues who are part of a joint HKU Sun Yat-sen University project. I’m personally benefiting from these mainland facilities and opportunities now available. Indeed, my own Laboratory for Space Research at HKU has, over the last 3 years, negotiated a series of important memoranda of understanding and formal agreements with several major mainland bodies that would have been impossible just a few years ago. Here, with our partners, we commit real intent and resources to joint endeavors. One example includes the “Lobster Eye” X-ray Satellite that was launched in July last year, thanks to the support of our mainland partners

of the Beijing Institute of Space Mechanics and Electricity and Nanjing University. We anticipate this space research mission, the first of its kind for Hong Kong, will deliver exciting eye-opening outcomes. At the heart of all these indicators of progress is, for me, the issue of trust. It is not just the intent and the availability of programs and opportunities for joint scientific and technological collaboration with the mainland that matters, what’s equally valuable is the trust in your partners and they in you, which allows us to work together effectively with confidence within these schemes. I put great store in developing such trust and, when you have it, it’s the most precious commodity of all that drives everything forward together.

In parallel to all of the above, there’s the ongoing establishment of branch universities on the mainland side of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area by nearly all Hong Kong Special Administrative Region universities. There cannot be a stronger sign of cross-border collaboration. My own university, HKU, is the last of 7 HKSAR universities to commit to setting up a joint campus in Shenzhen under an integrated “one university two campuses” approach. To me, this is a very exciting and innovative development as all students and teachers will be able to travel, study and work between the two campuses as needed. The clear intent is to create a more seamless, integrated HKU straddling both sides of the boundary with educational benefits spreading across the entire Greater Bay Area and also more broadly, given HKU’s high international reputation and standing.

There are also various other formal channels that promote cooperation in science

and technology between the HKSAR and the mainland. These include joint conferences, planning of joint laboratories and the ongoing establishment of State Key labs in Hong Kong. I, personally, see all these beneficial, strategic activities as a harbinger of the eventual integration of our research infrastructure and programs. Indeed, the strengthening of scientific and technological cooperation under the “one country, two systems” approach is one specific advantage our science community can enjoy while not preventing or affecting the majority of our existing global scientific collaborations and partnerships that have dominated our international connections in the past. It is one that can leverage our special status and unique placement in this part of Southeast Asia to enhanced global effect.

In summary, our place in the Greater Bay Area in particular and our increasing incorporation into its broad ecosystem, will depend ever more strongly on seizing the opportunities for mainland cooperation. These are almost limitless for our Hong Kong-based scientists, researchers and technologists. There has never been a better environment to reach out, join up and work together for mutual benefit and shared prosperity via the proving ground the Greater Bay Area offers for all sorts of smart city technologies, infrastructure and initiatives over the coming decade. All this is underpinned by an invigorated tertiary education system that is ever more interconnected and open to talent in all its diverse forms as incubators for ideas, innovation and integration.

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