

THE USE OF GENERIC *WE* IN WRITTEN POLITICAL COMMENTARY
IN HONG KONG

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1. Introduction

This article is part of a survey which investigated written political commentary in Hong Kong. It is based on a corpus of newspaper articles taken from the political comment column in the South China Morning Post before and after the handover of power in 1997.

In these articles one particular linguistic feature was singled out for attention, the so-called "generic" use of first-person plural pronouns (henceforth 1PP pronouns), as in this example:

We are entering the final month of British rule ... Soon we will all have a leadership which cares for us ... (DC, May 29)

It was hoped that the use of generic *we* in this column, written as it was by six contributors from across the political spectrum, would throw light on an interesting aspect of political commentary at that time, namely the way politicians claimed the right to speak for an entire community (in this case, Hong Kong).

An earlier output based on the corpus, Berry (forthcoming), took a more global approach to the use of generic *we*, looking at its use and reference across the corpus, with a view to identifying general trends (in particular comparing pre- and post-handover periods in Hong Kong). Thus it did not consider individual texts, and did not take into account important features such as the patterning of generic *we* within a text (particularly its interplay with lexical alternatives) and its use as a cohesive device. This article aims to redress the balance by focussing on extended extracts from individual texts and taking a whole one as an example.

2. *We* in political discourse

The traditional paradigm of personal pronouns is well known (see, for example, Quirk et al. 1985: 336; Greenbaum 1966: 166, and other more learner-oriented grammars). Recently, it has been argued (Wales 1996; Mühlhäusler – Harré 1990) that traditional accounts have given too much emphasis to the categories of person, case, number and gender, and have ignored dimensions of discourse and use. Wales claims that “far too many interesting connotations and rhetorical effects in fact have been ignored by grammarians altogether” (1996: xii).

One dimension of the use of *we* that has long been familiar to grammarians is the distinction between inclusive and exclusive reference. The former includes the listener/reader while in the latter they are excluded. Some languages, e.g., Tok Pisin (Wales 1996: 58) and some northern dialects of Chinese (Norman 1988: 158), lexicalise this distinction.

The generic *we* that is central to this paper is seen by Quirk et al. (1985: 350, 353) as an extension of the inclusive use: “The reference of ‘inclusive *we*’ can be progressively enlarged ... from those involved in the immediate speech situation to the whole human race” (1985: 354).

We live in an age of great changes.

Wales takes a different approach, systematically opposing specific (definite) uses, that is, both inclusive and exclusive, to generic or indefinite reference (while viewing them as a continuum, rather than as a dichotomy). She argues that

... although the so-called ‘generic or indefinite’ ... uses of the pronouns *we* and *you* as well as *they* are exceedingly common in speech ..., they tend to be but briefly described or, more surprisingly, not mentioned at all by grammarians (Wales 1996: 45).

Within a discourse approach, many writers have pointed out the “political” nature of *we*, though mostly with regard to spoken language. Fairclough (1989: 179) studied the use of pronouns in the political oratory of Margaret Thatcher, noting how she used IPP pronouns to make her views seem to be the views of the people. Pennycook (1994) points out how the use of IPP pronouns is often “political”, even outside political discourse, in that they imply power relationships.

Flowerdew (1996, 1997) looks at the political discourse of the last governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten and notes his use of generic IPP pronouns which is intended, according to Flowerdew, “to ingratiate himself with Hong Kong society” (1997: 463), as in this example:

The joint declaration describes how we live. We are a community not a Lego set. We can't be dismantled ...

While in this example Patten is clearly referring to the community as a whole (and claiming the right to speak for it), reference is not always so easy to assign. As Wales points out: “the *we* of politician speak is a shifting signifier, since it is used with many different scopes of reference even within a single discourse” (Wales 1996: 62). She exemplifies this with an example from John Major where “*we* is variously the Prime Minister and the Government officials at Maastricht, the Tory party and Britain as a nation”:

On economic and monetary union, we said: ‘You go on a path leading to a single currency ... We will decide ... whether we want to join you’. And at Maastricht I won for Britain a special provision. We are not committed to the goal of a single currency (John Major in the Evening Standard, September 21, 1992, after Wales 1996: 62).

Flowerdew notes a similar ambiguity in a speech by Patten (1996: 578) where *we* could refer to Patten and his audience (inclusive), to Patten and his government (exclusive) or to everyone in Hong Kong (generic). The fact that such shifting and ambiguous reference may cause problems of interpretation can be seen as intentional, as part of the politician’s art. And at the same time as providing a useful covering device for imprecise and shifting meanings, the formal identity involved in the repetition of IPP pronouns helps to create a sense of cohesion (Wales 1996: 25).

3. The survey

In order to study the use of generic *we* in political discourse in Hong Kong, a corpus was assembled of over 40 articles taken from the political comment column of the South China Morning Post in May-June and September-October in 1997 (that is, before and after the handover).¹ Other written and spoken examples of political commentary from other sources were also collected.

The term “political commentary” is used here to distinguish this variety from other types of political journalism. Reporters are expected to be “objective” in

¹ Hong Kong has a small but thriving English language press: two dailies and several weeklies (though this is nothing compared to the Chinese language scene) and countless foreign publications are available. Scollon (1997: 383) estimates that it is the most active newspaper-reading community in the world. The South China Morning Post (and its Sunday counterpart, the Sunday Morning Post) is read extensively by the educated expatriate and Chinese communities and has influence out of proportion to its comparatively limited circulation. In general editorial policy is to follow British English in obvious areas such as spelling, but the international background of many of its journalists allows for other influences.

their writing, or rather (because of the impossibility of achieving absolute objectivity) to distance themselves from their text and not to make overt appearances in it via the use of 1PP pronouns. However, in commentary, the writer (who may not be principally a journalist) is allowed to, indeed, expected to present an overtly personal view. This may either be achieved by using the singular *I*, or by claiming to speak for more than oneself by using *we*. In the column from which this corpus is taken, the columnists were primarily politicians, not journalists, and so could indeed be expected to put forward personal views in a personal tone.

The political comment column in the South China Morning Post had a range of contributors. The editor had achieved “balance” by inviting writers from across the political spectrum, from both the pro-China and “pro-democracy” lobbies. The six columnists were Ronald Arculli (RA in the examples quoted), David Chu Yiu Lin (DC), Emily Lau (EL), Christine Loh (CL), Tsang Yok Sing (TSY), and Fanny Wong (FW). A fuller description of them can be found in Appendix 1.

The South China Morning Post’s editorial policy is to aim for British English and contributors are assumed to have native or native-like competence. All of the writers in this study had undergone English-medium instruction to a high level, and some had studied in Britain.

Some initial findings from the survey are reported in Berry (forthcoming).

- 1) A similar number of articles before and after the handover referred to Hong Kong using 1PP pronouns. Thus it was tentatively concluded that there had been no decrease in the expression of political views after the handover (taking this measure of claiming to speak for the community as an indicator).
- 2) There was a great dominance of generic over exclusive 1PP pronouns in the articles. There were 67 instances of generic 1PP pronouns compared to 17 exclusive (and of these 15 occurred in one article). In fact 16 columns used generic 1PP pronouns and only 2 exclusive. Generic reference seemed to be the default interpretation in this genre, even at the start of articles.
- 3) A wide range of expressions were used in the corpus to refer lexically to (the people of) Hong Kong: *Hong Kong*, *Hong Kong people*, *the community*, *the territory*, *the people*, *the public*, *local people*.
- 4) There seemed to a number of cases of anaphora involving the first use of 1PP pronouns, where the writer would use a lexical expression to refer to Hong Kong and then refer back to it with a 1PP pronoun (similar to the way 3PP pronouns are be used). For example:

This meant that Hong Kong people would “rule Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy”, and that – except for defence and foreign

affairs – we would be masters of our own house. (Martin Lee, Sunday Morning Post, May 11)

Here the lexical and pronominal forms are clearly coreferential. It is as though the writer wanted to make the reference absolutely clear (and did not trust to the default assumption of genericness mentioned above) before embarking on his claim to speak for the people. There were also examples of this anaphoric *we* where reference was exclusive. More examples are given below.

- 5) Clear cases of reference shift within texts, as described and exemplified above with reference to spoken discourse, were hard to establish. This is perhaps because in written discourse such ambiguity and shifting are easier to identify, and writers would be held to account for their lack of precision.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Overall patterns

19 articles were included in this version of the corpus; a summary of them is included as Appendix 1. For the sake of this study, the original corpus (as found in Berry forthcoming) was modified slightly. Articles which contained only exclusive uses of *we* were removed, as well as those with only lexical references to Hong Kong, and three other articles which fell outside the original 5-week time frame were added. This gave a total (quite by chance) of exactly 100 1PP pronouns.

Table 1. Frequency of generic 1PP pronouns.

pronoun	frequency
<i>we</i>	43
<i>us</i>	11
<i>our</i>	43
<i>ourselves</i>	3
TOTAL	100

Table 1 shows that the most frequent 1PP pronouns in the corpus were by far *we* and *our*.² The relatively low frequency for the objective *us* is not surprising, given that it is not a “powerful” pronoun, in that it shows things being done to

² The possessive “adjective”, *our*, was counted as a pronoun since it is part of the paradigm.

the group which the writer is claiming to speak for, not things being done by them.

The average of 1PP pronouns per article was just over 5, but this figure hides vast variation. In many articles 1PP pronouns are infrequent, considering that the average length of the column is 600 words; indeed, in several articles there is only one 1PP pronoun. However, 12 out of the 19 articles had 5 or more instances of 1PP pronouns (see Table 2), and one (the selected article) had as many as 15.

Table 2. Distribution of 1PP pronouns in the corpus.

incidence of 1PP pronouns	no. of articles
1	6
2	1
5	1
6	7
8	1
11	2
15	1

The most common incidences were one and six (in six and seven articles respectively) and no articles had 3 or 4 instances of 1PP pronouns. For those articles where 1PP pronouns were infrequent, it seems that their inclusion was almost an oversight:

Now we know that there is no through-train ... (TYS, 13/5)

Let us never forget that the last bulwark sustaining the media are the people they serve. (FW, 14/5)

The articles containing them do not have the demagogic tone that would be expected from a writer claiming to speak for the community. Only when the incidence rises to five or more can one expect that the repeated use of 1PP pronouns could serve both as a cohesive (holding the text together) and as a rhetorical (maintaining the power of the writer) device, for part or all of the text.

4.2. Patterning in texts

The first thing that becomes apparent is that even where articles have several instances of generic 1PP pronouns, they are not interspersed throughout the text but concentrated in one or two sections. Goatly (1999: 171) finds a similar phenomenon in a Singaporean newspaper article that he studied.

To illustrate this here is part of the text of Fanny Wong's May 21 article. Numbers in brackets at the start refer to the number of the paragraph, in a total of 18; paragraphs 1-6 and 15-18 have no references, pronominal or lexical, to Hong Kong people.

(7) *Hong Kong has been lucky that in the past, even though the colonial administration was not as accountable and transparent as **the people** would have liked, we did, and we still do, enjoy a high degree of press freedom, making us the envy of many of our neighbours.*

and later in the same article:

(12) *Today, we can confidently say that our government is not alienated from the needs of **the community**.*

(13) *And compared with our compatriots in China, we can also proudly say that we do know to a large extent how government policies are formulated and implemented.*

(14) *Hong Kong people treasure these traditions.*

However, in between she has recourse to third-person plural pronouns to refer to Hong Kong people:

(10) *The government may not necessarily act in accordance with all the views expressed, but it does respond to what is demanded by **the people**. **The community** may not be at all satisfied with the government's actions, but **they** do not, just because of **their** grievances, take drastic action to overturn the Government.*

(11) *Instead, **people** resort to peaceful demonstrations and elect those who share **their** views to make sure **their** wishes come true.*

This "inconsistency" can easily be accounted for. 1PP pronouns could perhaps have been used in paragraph 10, but are not because of the unpleasant action that is mooted, which the author did not wish to be associated with. In paragraph 11, there is a greater level of generality achieved by the use of the indefinite expression *people* and the use of *our* instead of *their* would not be possible.

In order to investigate the patterning of 1PP pronouns with coreferential noun phrases, it will be useful to make a comparison with third-person pronouns, since this patterning has been studied extensively, e.g., Wales (1996), Hoey (1991). Wales (1996: 30-36) examines the patterns in which coreferential third-person pronouns and noun phrases co-occur. She notes that the grammatically-"correct" pattern, whereby an introductory noun phrase is followed by a string of anaphoric 3PP pronouns, is not always typical.

She points out that factors such as distance and avoidance of ambiguity cannot account for “unexpected” repetition of the noun phrase, as in this quasi-legalistic example (1996: 34):

*We will use the services of **third parties** in connection with the points programme and disclosure of cardholder names and addresses to **third parties** may be required to fulfil claims. This information will be provided to **third parties** for this purpose only.*

She suggests that factors such as style and genre may be at work, with NP repetition being common in a more formal style and in certain genres (such as legal language). Another factor may be the rhetorical device that has been called “elegant variation” (1996: 35). Wales also cites research indicating that reversion to the NP is more likely at topic changes and paragraph boundaries (1996: 34).

She suggests that the pattern where the NP alternates with 3PP pronoun use should be taken as the norm (1996: 33). The question for this paper is: does this pattern apply to 1PP pronouns as well?

It is not hard to find texts in the corpus where this is the case. Here are the 12th and 13th (out of 16) paragraphs from another column by Fanny Wong’s (September 17):

(13) *It is all very well for Mr Tung to declare that **we in Hong Kong** can make **our** own decisions at next year’s elections, but **local people** want proof that **our** future is in **our** own hands.*

(14) *If **the people** cannot persuade Mr Tung that some elements of the present electoral package are not democratic and need to be amended, how can he convince **the community** that **we in Hong Kong** are the masters of **our** destiny?*

Although the alternation is not exact (one 1PP pronoun then one NP) it is certainly regular and sustained.

Incidentally, this text supports the point made above about the limited length of claiming to speak for the community, since these were the only two paragraphs in the column to contain such reference. It is also interesting to note that the lexical alternatives are all different (*local people, the people, the community*); is this an extreme version of elegant variation? In another article, Christine Loh (October 6) uses a whole range of alternatives: *the public, the people, the community, community* (used attributively), and *Hong Kong* (though these are not in alternation with 1PP pronouns; there is only one generic *us* later on).

4.3. One selected article

The column chosen for a detailed analysis was that written by Ronald Arculli on September 11 on the topic of the election of Hong Kong deputies to China’s National People’s Congress. It was chosen because it contained the most common 1PP pronouns (*we* and *our*) as well as lexical references to Hong Kong, and because these forms were distributed widely through the article. The text is contained in Appendix 3.

Of course, one chosen text can never be representative of the whole corpus; it cannot show all of the phenomena identified, nor will these be represented in the same proportions. However, it can show phenomena which would be lost in a wider survey, for example the alternation between lexical and pronominal reference, the density of use in some parts of a text and the absence in others.

In the article there were 15 instances of 1PP pronouns: 5 of *we* and 10 of *our*. Although this does not correspond exactly to the overall pattern shown above in Table 1, these two pronouns were still the most frequent. There were 11 cases of *Hong Kong* (of which 4 were in the genitive). Two cases of first-person singular pronouns (one *I* and one *my*) were noted and included in the analysis for the sake of comparison. All these instances are highlighted in Appendix 3 and numbered for ease of reference.

With 26 references to Hong Kong in all (lexically or pronominally) it is not surprising that they should be interspersed throughout the text (unusually, since, as was pointed out above, in most texts they are typically confined to one or two sections). However, there were two short sections where they were absent. There were two short paragraphs (4 and 5) containing a lot of facts with no reference to Hong Kong, and there was one paragraph (the 8th) where first-person singular reference was dominant, being used for the overt expression of opinions (*My guess is that ... I would not be surprised if ...*).

The only potential lexical alternative to 1PP pronouns used is *Hong Kong*; there is none of the variation found in some of the other articles. This is explainable by the text being more formal and legalistic in nature; much lexical variation would not have been appropriate.

The first two instances seem to be a clear case of the anaphora mentioned above:

*The reunification with China has given **Hong Kong** a right and privilege, which **we** did not enjoy before ...*

It is as though the first mention with *Hong Kong* serves to establish the community which *we* is referring to. It was seen in the other study (Berry forthcoming) that such a “paving of the way” is generally not necessary in political commentary, since the default assumption is that 1PP pronouns will have generic reference.

However, some thought needs to be given to whether the lexical and pronominal references are coreferential elsewhere. In all the eleven other instances of *Hong Kong* except one, it would be possible to replace *Hong Kong* with 1PP pronouns: *our* (9 cases) or *us* (once – in (1)). The exception is (5), where *Hong Kong* is part of a locative (*in Hong Kong*). However, substitutability is not proof of identity, and it is arguable whether other instances of *Hong Kong* do refer to the same entity as the pronouns. In (28) and elsewhere, for example, *Hong Kong* seems to have a more political, impersonal nature:

For these and other reasons our (27) participation in the NPC election will ensure Hong Kong's (28) place in a developing China.

Elsewhere in the corpus there were more obvious cases of a distinction being drawn between NP and 1PP reference, with *Hong Kong* being seen as an entity distinct from its people and being shown as such by the choice of pronoun:

If Hong Kong wants to reap the benefit of its past public investments ... then we should welcome more interest from people in the political process.

Indeed, if Hong Kong is to have an active civil society and politics which deals with real issues, then it needs more people to take part directly in the political process (CL, May 19)

However, there were no 3PP pronouns referring to *Hong Kong* in the selected text. And perhaps it does not matter whether all the lexical and pronominal referents in it are exactly coreferential. It was seen above how the reference of 1PP pronouns could vary within a text, particularly in political discourse; the same could hold for lexical counterparts. Perhaps what matters is whether there is an impression on readers of a degree of similarity, of an overlapping of reference. Such an impression would be reinforced in this case by the anaphora in the first two instances.

Another factor would seem to support this argument. This is the way in which the lexical and pronominal forms alternate with one another fairly evenly throughout the text. The maximum string of uninterrupted 1PP pronouns is 3 (6-8), and there is only one case where two NPs occur in sequence (4 and 5), but they are in separate paragraphs. One would expect larger clusters of NPs and 1PP pronouns if the writer wished to make a clearer distinction between when he was speaking for the community and when not.

Thus it can be supposed that the interplay between pronouns and lexical equivalents reinforces cohesion in the text. The main reason for the variation would again seem to be to avoid constant repetition of the pronouns, to achieve elegant variation, for ambiguity and distance, as elsewhere, did not seem to be

factors. There may also be a rhetorical justification; the writer can still claim to speak for the community without overusing the more obvious exponents.

On a related issue, there was no evidence that the lexical choice was being made at paragraph boundaries (cf. Wales above); of the six cases where reference was made to *Hong Kong*, three used the lexical form and three the pronominal. This may have something to do with the shortness of paragraphs in the text, which is typical of newspapers.

5. Conclusions

Overall *we* in written political discourse seems to behave substantially the same in writing as in speech. It is used by writers to put themselves in the position of spokespeople for the community, to project their own views onto everyone.

However, in the corpus, systematically claiming to speak for the community via the use of generic *we* was fairly infrequent; though many articles included some generic 1PP pronouns, in a large proportion of these their use was isolated. (And it must be remembered already that over half of the texts in the larger corpus had been excluded because they had no reference to the community at all.)

Only when there was a more frequent and concentrated incidence of 1PP pronouns could it be claimed that they serve as a cohesive device. Indeed, it was interesting that, for the most part, only sections of texts (rather than whole texts) contained generic *we*. And there were cases where other “voices” played a dominant role in the text: first-person singular to show overtly a writer’s opinions and 3PP to distance the writer from the community, while still referring to *Hong Kong*.

In a number of ways, *we* seems to behave like 3PP pronouns, not only in its anaphoric use, but also in the way it patterns with coreferential noun phrases. That is, in many texts there was an alternation between the pronominal and lexical forms, and while it is debatable whether all the lexical instances were exactly coreferential, the semantic similarity could be said to reinforce cohesion (in the same way that the shifting reference of 1PP pronouns may have the same effect in spoken discourse). The main reason for this alternation appeared to be elegant variation.

The final lesson that should be learnt from this study is that personal pronouns cannot, in discourse terms, be considered on their own; lexical referents must be included to get a truer picture of texts. The interplay of lexical and pronominal forms create a cohesion that is stronger than either alone. This in turn may have a more powerful effect on the reader, if a less obvious one, in that the claim to speak for the community is not made exclusively and repetitively through the use of *we*. But of course, that is the aim of the politician’s rhetoric: to say something without actually appearing to say it.

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APPENDIX 1. The columnists

- 1) Ronald Arculli (RA in the examples quoted). Vice-Chairman of the Liberal Party. Businessman and member of the Executive Council under Patten. Elected to the 1998 legislature through a functional constituency.
- 2) David Chu Yiu Lin (DC). Businessman. Member of the Provisional Legislative Council and Preliminary Working Committee. Elected to the 1998 legislature through the election committee.
- 3) Emily Lau (EL). Outspoken supporter of democracy and critic of Britain's colonial legacy. Member of Legislative Council under Patten. Elected to the 1998 legislature through a geographical constituency.
- 4) Christine Loh (CL). Member of Legislative Council under Patten. Founder and Chair of the Citizens' Party. Elected to the 1998 legislature through a geographical constituency.
- 5) Tsang Yok Sing (TSY). Former secondary school headmaster. Chairman of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB). Elected to the 1998 legislature through a geographical constituency.
- 6) Fanny Wong (FW) Former political editor.

APPENDIX 2. The 19 articles analysed

Author/date	Incidence of IPP pronouns	Total	Topic
1) TYS, 13/5:	1 <i>we</i>	1	preparatory committee
2) FW, 14/5:	1 <i>us</i> (at end, 'let us')	1	press freedom
3) CL, 19/5:	4 <i>we</i> , 2 <i>our</i>	6	interest in politics
4) FW, 21/5:	5 <i>we</i> , 1 <i>our</i>	6	HK's future
5) EL, 26/5:	1 <i>our</i> (in title)	1	loss of autonomy
6) FW, 28/5:	2 <i>our</i>	2	revision of textbooks
7) DC, 29/5:	2 <i>we</i> , 2 <i>us</i> , 1 <i>our</i> , 1 <i>ourselves</i>	6	democrat 'doomsayers'
8) CL, 2/6:	1 <i>our</i>	1	loss of representation
9) RA, 5/6:	1 <i>we</i>	1	Anson Chan
10) RA, 11/9:	5 <i>we</i> , 10 <i>our</i>	15	elections
11) FW, 17/9:	2 <i>we</i> (in Hong Kong), 4 <i>our</i>	6	Tung Chee-Hwa
12) RA, 25/9:	3 <i>we</i> , 2 <i>us</i> , 1 <i>our</i>	6	elections
13) FW, 1/10:	1 <i>we</i> (= HK and China), 1 <i>us</i> , 3 <i>our</i>	5	national celebrations
14) DC, 2/10:	5 <i>we</i> , 1 <i>us</i> , 4 <i>our</i> , 1 <i>ourselves</i>	11	HK's image
15) CL, 6/10:	1 <i>us</i>	1	suggestions to TCH
16) RA, 9/10:	8 <i>we</i> , 2 <i>us</i> , 1 <i>our</i>	11	labour problems
17) FW, 15/10:	1 <i>we</i> , 1 <i>us</i> , 4 <i>our</i>	6	Chinese history
18) CL, 20/10:	2 <i>we</i> , 3 <i>our</i> , 1 <i>ourselves</i>	6	slum clearance
19) TYS, 21/10:	3 <i>we</i> , 5 <i>our</i>	8	education

APPENDIX 3. The article (*italics and numbers in brackets added*)

NPC role ensures greater influence

Ronald Arculli

(South China Morning Post, September 11, 1997)

The reunification with China has given *Hong Kong* (1) a right and privilege, which *we* (2) did not enjoy under British rule, to elect *our* (3) deputies into China's law-making body. Scheduled to take place before the end of this year, the election of *Hong Kong* (4) deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) of China is another milestone in the "one country, two systems" formula.

As it was impossible for China to conduct elections in *Hong Kong* (5) of deputies to the NPC, *our* (6) deputies were "subsumed" under the Guangdong province's delegation and appointed rather than elected.

How *we* (7) will return *our* (8) NPC deputies has aroused some debate. A decision was taken the NPC in March that *Hong Kong* (9) will return 36 deputies through an election committee comprising Chinese nationals among the 400-strong Selection Committee that elected *our* (10) chief Executive, plus the *Hong Kong* (11) representatives to the national Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and the members of the Provisional Legislative Council.

As there are some overlapping members, it is estimated that the election committee will have 420 electors.

The NPC obviously had to innovate so that an election within six months of the reunification could be held.

Chinese law provides that every 220,000 people in cities or 880,000 people in rural areas are entitled to have one NPC deputy. Were it not for the NPC's special resolution in March, *we* (12) would only be entitled to 29 deputies in the 3,000-strong assembly.

Apart from secret balloting, *our* (13) election for NPC deputies will resemble the mainland's in that the number of candidates cannot exceed the number of seats by 50 per cent – in *Hong Kong's* (14) case, not more than 54. But, in case there is more *our* (15) election committee will cast votes to reduce the number of candidates to 54, while its mainland counterparts do so by consultation..

My (16) guess is that at least one-third of the provisional Legislative Council members will run for the NPC, as will some of the 28 incumbent NPC deputies and many others with or without political background. The Provisional Legislative Council election saw 130 candidates for 130 seats. *I* (17) would not be surprised if *we* (18) have 150 or more candidates running for the 36 NPC seats.

According to the NPC Election Law, political parties, organisations and electors endorsing any candidate will be able to introduce them to electors in pre-election meetings. Given *Hong Kong's* (19) tradition of open and competitive

elections, *we* (20) can expect that the forthcoming NPC election will be preceded by intense campaigning and debate.

Electioneering has begun as some potential candidates are releasing their election platform through the media. At issue is the interpretation of "one country, two systems" and the role of party politics in the NPC.

Are *Hong Kong* (21) deputies required to pledge allegiance to China's constitution including the four cardinal principles? Must *our* (22) deputies place *Hong Kong's* (23) interests before the country's in case of conflicts? How will they handle *our* (24) relationship with other regions? Is it wise to aim at transfusing *Hong Kong* (25) political culture into the NPC? Is it a question of "to conform or to confront"? Is it advisable to keep local politicians and NPC deputies distinct? Will NPC duties conflict with local political offices?

How *our* (26) deputies answer these and other challenging questions is of tremendous importance. Even before the election, opinions voiced by radical reformists or conservative candidates may be heard in Beijing and the whole country. For these and other reasons *our* (27) participation in the NPC election will ensure *Hong Kong's* (28) place in a developing China.