

Before 1997, politics was not a top priority for the masses, remembers James Tien. More taxing was the question of how socialist China would rule capitalist Hong Kong. "That was what most people were concerned about: maintaining our way of life," he says. But over the last decade, politics has become increasingly important to Hongkongers — the current topic of choice is universal suffrage, something Tien talks about regularly.

Tien believes it is possible for Hong Kong to elect its own chief executive in 2012 — but new candidates with realistic agendas are needed, or he predicts the economy could tumble. "The opposition takes the view that we should give more," he says. "If not free lunches then subsidised lunches, or education at 80 per cent subsidy. As far as they're concerned, spending money is what they want to do. How we can make money in Hong Kong, they have no idea."

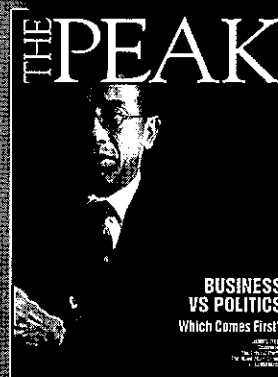
This is of particular concern for Tien's pro-business Liberal Party, as foreign investment appears to have dwindled over the last decade, with companies bypassing Hong Kong in favour of China — something Tien sees as a real threat. "We are losing our competitiveness," he warns.

Clearing air pollution, bettering education and staging more large-scale events are ways to promote Hong Kong as a desirable city to live in and do business in. He suggests that the government should aim to create more golf and tennis tournaments, increase the number of entertainment areas like SoHo, and possibly even build our own casino if we want to compete with mainland cities.

But it won't be Tien heading such directives come 2012. Instead, he is on the lookout for a promising new candidate. "Hong Kong is a vibrant international city. I think the city needs a vibrant young leader." ▲

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Since our last interview, James Tien has continued his work as a legislator and chairman for the Liberal Party. In addition, his list of public service contributions has expanded to include his role as the chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board.



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It isn't universal suffrage that holds the answer to Hong Kong's future success, it's cleaner air and more golf, says Liberal Party chairman James Tien.

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KEEPING UP APPEARANCES