

INDICATORS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

HONG KONG 1999

Edited by

Lau Siu-kai Lee Ming-kwan

Wan Po-san Wong Siu-lun

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies

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—— Hong Kong 1999 ——

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2001

Research Monograph No. 53

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ISBN 962-441-553-6

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

Printed in Hong Kong by Fung Hang Printing Co. Ltd.

**Indicators of Social Development:
Hong Kong 1999**

Contributors

CHAN Ying-keung

*Professor, Department of Sociology,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

HO Kwok-leung

*Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Sciences,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University*

LAU Siu-kai

*Professor of Sociology;
Associate Director, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

LAW Kwok-keung

*Research Assistant, Centre of Asian Studies,
The University of Hong Kong*

LEE Ming-kwan

*Professor and Associate Head, Department of Applied Social Sciences;
Director, Centre for Social Policy Studies,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University*

S. M. SHEN

*Deputy Director, School of Professional and Continuing Education,
The University of Hong Kong*

WAN Po-san

*Research Officer, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

WONG Siu-lun

*Professor of Sociology;
Director, Centre of Asian Studies,
The University of Hong Kong*

Thomas W. P. WONG

*Lecturer, Department of Sociology,
The University of Hong Kong*

Victor ZHENG

*Ph. D. Student, Department of Sociology,
The University of Hong Kong*

Preface

This book is the latest in a series of publications reporting on findings from six consecutive territory-wide Social Indicators Surveys conducted biennially since 1988.

These surveys were undertaken to gauge the perceptions, aspirations, attitudes and values, behavioural tendencies and quality of life of Hong Kong residents in different walks of life. The findings from these surveys throw light on the many issues and problems besetting Hong Kong society in the last years of British rule, in the run-up to 1997, and in the early years of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. They allow trends to be read and provide subjective indicators of various aspects of social and political life in Hong Kong.

These surveys resulted from a long-term collaborative project engaging three teams of researchers, one from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, one from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and one from The University of Hong Kong. The inter-institutional team was multi-disciplinary, made up of sociologists, psychologists, social workers, communications scholars, political scientists and statisticians.

The target population in this survey consisted of adults aged 18 and over who were living in Hong Kong at the time of the survey. A stratified sample of 6,772 valid addresses was drawn, and 3,274 respondents were successfully interviewed, yielding a response rate of 48.4 per cent.

The questionnaires used in these surveys are all divided into two parts. The first part of each questionnaire consists of "core" items to be answered by all respondents. These items cover their personal and family data, quality of life indicators, and key indicators measuring important aspects of social and political life in Hong Kong. "Core" items are more or less "permanent"; they are

asked every time and only in exceptional cases are changes — dropping old or adding new items — made. The stability of core items enables trends to be read over time.

The second part consists of a number of modules on special topics each answered by a sub-sample of the respondents. Twenty-three modules were covered between 1988 and 1997.

- 1988 (A) family life, social network and social welfare
(B) housing, leisure, work, medical condition and health
(C) social stratification, social mobility and religion
(D) political and legal values
- 1990 (A) housing and social welfare
(B) mental health, family and social life
(C) social mobility and occupational prestige ranking
(D) legal and political attitudes
(E) mass communication and work
- 1993 (A) popular culture and religion
(B) economic culture
(C) family, gender and neighbourliness
(D) political parties and mental health
(E) health indicators and alcohol and drug use
(F) education, social welfare and non-institutional social actions
- 1995 (A) education and religion
(B) family, political participation, materialism and social values
(C) housing, gender and mental health
(D) political and legal culture
(E) leisure, privacy and housing density
- 1997 (A) economic culture, popular culture and identity
(B) identity, poverty and inequality
(C) political attitudes

Carried out in 1999, this survey focuses on (A) economic culture and value; (B) class and identity; (C) political attitudes; and (D) life satisfaction and social network. Module (A) was

“owned” by The University of Hong Kong team, module (B) by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University team, and modules (C) and (D) by The Chinese University of Hong Kong team.

Over the years the surveys have accumulated a huge data base and generated a rich repertoire of empirically based propositions on Hong Kong society ranging from mental health, religious values and attitudes to housing and welfare, to class identity and political attitudes. Like Chinese scaffolding these propositions build upon and lend support to each other. Together they configure a multi-faceted portrayal of Hong Kong society in social and political transition. They are rich materials for “middle-range” theories.

This book should be read, therefore, both as the latest of a series of reports on public attitudes and social trends, and as a new set of empirically based propositions from which to launch theoretical expeditions.

In the completion of this report, we have enjoyed the assistance and support of many quarters. In particular, we would like to thank the following units for financial support: the Research Grants Council of the University Grants Committee, the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the T. Y. Wong Foundation. We also want to thank the Census and Statistics Department of the HKSAR government for its help in sampling; Mr Yiu Chuen-lai, Mr Yip Tin-sang, Mr Law Kwok-keung and Ms Cheung Wai-yi for their research assistance; Mr Benjamin Blain for editing; and Mr Mok Kam-wah, Ms Hidy Leung and Ms Loretta Chan for production and proof-reading. Needless to say, the help of our interviewers and the cooperation of our interviewees were indispensable to the success of the project.

*Lau Siu-kai Lee Ming-kwan
Wan Po-san Wong Siu-lun*

June 2001

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From a Free Economy to an Interventionist Society

The Crisis of Governance in Hong Kong

Victor Zheng

Law Kwok-keung

Wong Siu-lun

Just two years after the transfer of sovereignty to China, Hong Kong plunged into crisis and despair. Most of the middle class incurred losses in the stock market; some lost their jobs. Many property owners became owners of “negative assets” — a special term tailored for a group of people whose property value was lower than their mortgage amount. Many people attributed such misfortune to the changing policies of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government. During the colonial period, the government strictly adhered to the “non-interventionist” philosophy. The HKSAR government has been accused of moving away from *laissez-faire* to a more interventionist approach.

There are four core questions we want to address here: (1) Has Hong Kong’s socio-economic context changed since the transfer of sovereignty? (2) Has the HKSAR government become more inter-

ventionist? (3) If yes, what is the effect? (4) How can we interpret this changing perspective?

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on the general socio-economic context. We are interested to see if the socio-economic context has changed since the handover. The second part is concerned with the government's ruling philosophy. Questions concerning the changing role of the HKSAR government will be discussed. Questions about leadership form the third part of this chapter. A structural approach will be presented in analyzing this aspect. The final part is a concluding section on the crisis of governance in Hong Kong. We will integrate all findings and map out the relations between the changing perspectives of Hong Kong people and the administration's governance since the handover.

Socio-economic Context

As an international metropolis, Hong Kong's success does not rely on any single factor. A clean and efficient government, a well-established legal system and free economic policy are just some of the contributing factors. Hong Kong's socio-economic context, with its emphasis on frugality, hard work, self-reliance and the family, is also vital. In the past, Hong Kong was viewed as a "paradise for success," a society which was full of opportunities for upward mobility. After the handover, have Hong Kong people's outlooks changed? To begin with, we asked our respondents to evaluate whether Hong Kong is still a place of opportunity. We asked, "in Hong Kong, everyone has the chance to be upwardly mobile, do you agree?" About 72.3 per cent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Less educated respondents showed even greater acceptance of this statement (Table 1.1).

Then, we go a step further to ask them the main personal factors for success or attaining upward mobility. Educational attainment was the most important condition (28.3 per cent). Hard