

INDICATORS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

HONG KONG 1997

Edited by

Lau Siu-kai Lee Ming-kwan

Wan Po-san Wong Siu-lun

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies

The Chinese University of Hong Kong



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Research Monograph No. 43

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ISBN 962-441-543-9

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

Printed in Hong Kong by Authentic Advertising & Printing Company

Preface

This book presents the findings of the fifth territory-wide Social Indicators Survey conducted largely during the period of May to September 1997. As the survey was done on the eve of the handover of Hong Kong to China by Britain, its findings can serve as a baseline to assess the future development of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The survey is also part of a long-term collaborative project undertaken by researchers at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and The University of Hong Kong. The focus of the survey is on subjective indicators, which include the perceptions, aspirations, values, beliefs, behavioural tendencies, grievances, and the degree of satisfaction with the quality of life of Hong Kong residents in different walks of life. The target population comprises adults aged 18 or above who are living in Hong Kong. A stratified sample of 4,237 valid addresses was drawn, and 2,120 respondents were successfully interviewed, yielding a response rate of 50.0 per cent.

The questionnaire used in this survey is divided into two parts. The first part is a core component to be answered by all respondents on quality of life and degree of satisfaction with different life domains. This core section is a permanent feature of the periodic survey so that social trends can be measured. The questions in the core component have differed slightly in the five Social Indicators Surveys, reflecting changing circumstances in Hong Kong and the research interests of the investigators in the project. The second part consists of a number of modules on special topics, and each module is answered by a sub-sample of the respondents. In this survey, there are three special modules: (A) economic culture,

popular culture and identity; (B) identity, poverty and inequality; and (C) political attitudes. Module (A) was administered by The University of Hong Kong, (B) by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and (C) by The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The social indicators project had its origin in a pilot survey of the inhabitants of Kwun Tong undertaken in 1986 by Lau Siu-kai and Wan Po-san at the Chinese University. Subsequently, an inter-institutional research team was formed to conduct a territory-wide survey on social attitudes and trends on a regular basis. The first Social Indicators Survey was carried out in 1988. There were four special modules in the first survey: (A) family life, social network and social welfare; (B) housing, leisure, work, medical condition and health; (C) social stratification, social mobility and religion; and (D) political and legal values.

The second survey was launched in 1990 and consisted of five special modules: (A) housing and social welfare; (B) mental health, family and social life; (C) social mobility and occupational prestige ranking; (D) legal and political attitudes; and (E) mass communication and work.

The third survey was conducted mostly in 1993 and consisted of six special modules: (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; and (F) education, social welfare and non-institutional social actions.

The fourth survey was conducted in 1995 and consisted of five special modules: (A) education and religion; (B) family, political participation, materialism and social values; (C) housing, gender and mental health; (D) political and legal culture; and (E) leisure, privacy and housing density.

In the context of Hong Kong, the study of social indicators serves at least five functions. First, it is a response by local social scientists to a heightened demand for improving the quality of life in the community which has become increasingly affluent and educated. Secondly, it can alert us to aspects of social life which merit in-depth investigation, such as popular attitudes and beliefs

concerning law and justice, and the vitality of traditional Chinese values. Thirdly, it can furnish empirical information and theoretical analysis for the formulation and implementation of social policies, for instance, in the areas of educational aspiration, intra-familial and marriage relationships, desire for home ownership, and subjective feelings of mental well-being. Fourthly, by keeping a close tab on the discrepancies between the objective conditions and subjective perceptions of the inhabitants, it may help us anticipate potential crises, the overcoming of which is indispensable if social stability is to be achieved during the transitional period. Finally, the findings from such surveys provide a chronicle of hopes and anxieties in our society at a key juncture in our history. They can contribute to the accumulation of a historical record of our unique case of social change from a British colony to a special administrative region of China.

The social indicators project, utilizing both a loosely-formulated "theoretical" framework and a flexible organizational structure which allow for the easy entry and exit of participant researchers with their diverse interests, is capable of generating a large amount of social information at minimal cost and of maintaining the long-term viability of the project. These arrangements are largely means to cope with the financial and manpower constraints faced by the project. Needless to say, these arrangements place priority on enhancing inter-institutional cooperation, mobilizing the extensive involvement of academics and catering to the research interests and personality idiosyncrasies of individual investigators. Accordingly, theoretical rigour has perforce to be relegated to second place. With the passage of time, with the maturation of the enterprise, and hopefully with the availability of more resources, the shortcomings of the project can be overcome. In the future, while the study of subjective social indicators will definitely be carried on, we plan to add to our project the compilation of objective indicators for Hong Kong. Preliminary work in the latter area has already begun.

In the completion of this study, 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 Hong Kong government for its help in sampling; Mr Shum Kwok-cheung, Mr Yiu Chuen-lai and Mr Tang Chun-wai for their research assistance; Dr Maurice Brosseau 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 are indispensable to the success of the project.

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December 1998

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Social Well-being during the Transitional Period

1988 - 1997

S. M. Shen

Y. L. Lai

Introduction

Since the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, Hong Kong has undergone an unprecedented process of political transition from being a British Colony to becoming a Special Administrative Region under the sovereignty of China. During this transitional period, Hong Kong has been undergoing a wide array of changes, the impact of which is yet to be investigated. On the economic side, while Hong Kong's economic development has resulted in the expansion of educational capacity, social commitments, etc., its economic restructuring from a trading and manufacturing centre to a service-oriented financial centre has led to more serious unemployment problems. On the political side, while its democratic reform has resulted in the blooming of political groups as well as political participation, the establishment of the Provisional Legislative Council has remained controversial. Facing such a dynamic and turbulent environment, how do Hong Kong people perceive the quality of their life?