

Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong

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It is always a challenge when policymakers must make decisions with imperfect information. Social scientists, however, have endeavoured to help policymakers reduce the risks of policymaking by providing solid, survey-based research reports. In many parts of the world, data and indicators to guide social, economic and political decisions can improve citizens' well-being, inform human development and provide a foundation for sustainable social development. *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 2004* is the latest in a series of reports on the findings of eight consecutive territory-wide Social Indicators Surveys conducted biennially in Hong Kong since 1988.

The book consists of 11 articles by different scholars, including two think-tank scholars from the government and a dozen scholars from four different academic institutions in Hong Kong. In the first article, Lau Siu-kai discusses the issue of democracy in post-colonial Hong Kong, which has experienced drastic economic and political changes since 1997. Lau argues that there are historical reasons for the city's democratic ambivalence after decades of incremental democratic development. In addition, both improved economic conditions and Hong Kongers' pragmatic attitude toward politics reduced the possibility of drastic democratisation. Next, Kwan Hsin-chi interprets the research findings on popular attitudes toward the Rule of Law in Hong Kong. According to Kwan, the rule of law is not perceived as important among the general public, whose poor understanding of this core value reduces their evaluation of its gravity. The basic fact, as the author argues, is that Hong Kong's legal culture is not yet ripe and will face future challenges in this period of transition. The third article is about health issues—specifically, perceptions and practices of Hong Kong people on health matters. According to Cheung, Chiu and Lee, Hong Kong people still cherish the value of good health and are satisfied with their health condition. Meanwhile, there is a growing concern among Hong Kong people toward Chinese medicine, despite their greater confidence in Western medicine. In addition, Hong Kong people are more satisfied with health services than they were in 1993. But the researchers also argue that health-care financing is still the crucial factor in sustaining Hong Kong's costly and user-friendly medical-service system.

In the fourth article, Tam Yeuk-mui discusses the issue of job security and flexible employment in Hong Kong. Based on the survey findings, the author concludes that employment flexibility still persists in the context of globalisation and economic restructuring. However, compared to the period of economic growth in past decades, Hong Kongers' employment flexibility at present is more associated with job insecurity.

In this book, two articles broach the issue of public attitudes and social anticipation. Wan and Law discuss post-1997 attitudes towards social problems in

Hong Kong. They write that Hong Kong people have critical but different attitudes on the seriousness of social problems; more importantly, there is still no broad consensus between public perceptions of social problems and social intervention against them. In Chapter 11, Wong and Zheng examine people's perceptions, attitudes and feelings towards post-1997 social realities in Hong Kong during the political, economic and social changes. Based on the survey results, the two researchers conclude that public perception and social behaviours may change because human feelings and emotions are subject to the changing environment and to the mode of public communication.

Three articles take a social-psychological stance to focus on the issue of well-being and social ethos in Hong Kong. In Chapter 7, Lui Tai-Lok argues that the middle-class maintains somewhat stable subjective feelings about Hong Kong society, though differences in perception exist within this population. Understandably, the lower middle-class tends to be more anxious than the upper-middle class, which may also influence coping strategies toward social changes. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the topic of subjective well-being in Hong Kong. According to Wan and Law, individual subjective well-being is not only affected by own personal attributes but also by social status and the changing political and economic environment. Zheng and Wong relate their statements of people's subjective well-being to declining fertility. According to the researchers, the fertility decline obviously parallels the increasing pressure among Hong Kong people to sustain a good future, which also implies that more workable policy recommendations should be provided over the long run to reduce the negative impact of this demographic change.

As a catalyst of social development, the 'helping profession' of social work can benefit greatly from other social scientists' research. This book is the research outcome of a multidisciplinary collaboration, which reflects the researchers' grounded perceptions and understandings of social development in Hong Kong from different perspectives of sociology, social work, political science, statistics and communication. Social work practice should be evidence-based and oriented to problem-solving, and this book should help local social workers positively respond to emerging social problems, increase social equality, and maintain social justice. Similarly, policymakers who want to be effective in macro-level social intervention not only need to know what is going on in the society but they also need to explain why society itself is changing. This book's research results and succinct but sound conclusions will indeed inform policymaking in Hong Kong. Last but not least, as an empirical and continual research project on a Chinese society, this book will be meaningful for social-work educators and practitioners in mainland China who want to merge grounded social science research with realistic social intervention to aid in building a harmonious society.

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