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Morality, Class and the Hong Kong Way of Life

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Abstract

A survey of some recent studies of Hong Kong society reveals a convergent tendency to pose the question of the nature of the moral outlook of the Hong Kong people and its relationship to the development experience and the way of life of the society. This paper attempts a sketch of the morality on the basis of survey findings on the perceptions and value orientations of the Hong Kong people with a view to stimulating future efforts in conceptual formulation of the problem and in the construction of specific hypotheses for empirical testing. The argument of the paper is in two parts. First, the mobility opportunities in the post-war development of the society have instilled an openness ideology which is individualistic, economistic and capitalistic in nature. Moral concerns are *prima facie* indifferently treated, as practical results and success are competitively pursued. But at the same time, there is some indication that the quest for an open and free society is not reducible to purely economic, profit-related interests. Secondly, the Hong Kong people are realistic in their evaluation of their personal career opportunities; they believe that there are inequalities and conflicts between the rich and poor; in particular, they have a low sense of political efficacy. Pragmatic, even fatalistic, acceptance characterizes their social and political mores. They are hardly concerned with the moral implications of their individual action or the outcome of such behaviour. The paper ends with a few comments on the societal reasons for such amorality and the conditions for its change.

Introduction

A survey of the present state of Hong Kong studies, we believe, will find two notable currents: tendencies which have benefited from the earlier (though relatively short in history and some would say in pedigree) tradition of social sciences in Hong Kong, and which, as we see it, would take our studies as a whole into uncharted and important territories. The first tendency is a systematic attempt to chart the subjective domain of the Hong Kong

people — its various contexts of life and the attendant issues and coping mechanisms — as it is affected by both current problems and more deep-lying and far-ranging characteristics of the society. The biennial Social Indicators project, beginning in earnest in 1988 and utilizing multi-disciplinary resources from a number of tertiary institutions, is one such notable example. Although, as participants ourselves, we would have liked to say more about the linkages of this project with the earlier survey studies, equally focussing on the, as it were, hopes and frustrations of the Hong Kong people, and thereby placing our attempts in a sharper historical context (e.g. what are the major issues we envision for our own times; are they any different from those in the 1960s?), we thought it would be sufficient for us, within the space of the present paper, to bring out some of the findings and implications of the project.[1] Our intention is to show that, in a comparison of the Social Indicators findings with similar survey findings in the 1960s and 1970s, we could find that there are both continuities and changes in the subjective territory of the Hong Kong people, and that, as an attempt to further thematize and theorize the findings, we are confronted, as we try to make sense of the recent findings, with this question: what is the Hong Kong morality? Do our findings, warts and all, suggest ways for us to characterize the components, the nature, of the morality?

If the Social Indicators project sets out to refine and to provide some longitudinal picture of the Hong Kong ethos and values, especially as they are tied, in their respective time periods and degree of primacy, to the development, to, indeed, the success, of the society itself, then the other tendency is more to redress imbalance of attention, to fill the gap of some sorely needed information, to set up a new agenda of studies, focussing on the structural differentials — class, inequality and mobility chance — engendered by and cotermious with the developmental experience itself. We have argued elsewhere that a systematic, and theoretically-oriented, understanding of the Hong Kong social structure, is essential to any claims made on behalf of the middle class and its ideological and political mission, or indeed any deliberation or pontifications on the secret of the Hong Kong's success and its institutional strengths or resilience.

One example will perhaps suffice: it has often been argued that the strength of our society lies in its economic prowness and flexibility, and in its contributions to the future sovereign country; and as the economic viability would be threatened by any social, especially class, conflicts, so any attempt to rock the social order boat is unwise, imprudent or worse, waging confrontational, ideological and mobilizational, battles with mainland China. The result could only be catastrophic. But could one conceive of the economy in isolation? (Even some of the capitalists no longer think so.) More specifically, just as the Hong Kong developmental experience presupposes as conducive conditions certain social structural factors and normative orientations, so the different and unequal ways people enter into and benefit from that experience should not fail to create inequalities and other invidious problems, with or without the 1997 question.[2] Neglecting the changes in the social structure and their implications for group formation in terms of socio-demographic and socio-political integuments (broadly, neglecting class analysis) could either result in short-changing the immanence of tensions and conflicts in our society (and thus making any call for prudence wishful thinking), or, worse, play into the hands of ideologists or interested parties, with the interests of the majority being sacrificed for the interests of the few, for the economic rationality of the ruling elite. In our Social Mobility study (1989-90), we find that not only has there been much mobility in the class/occupational structure, there are also signs of a middle class in the making. Quite irrespective of class background and mobility trajectory, the newcomers and those 'born to succeed' share some important socio-political orientations and values. But if there is openness and room at the top, with all the entailed consequences for class formation, there is also much evidence of inequalities, as they are manifested in mobility chance (either as moving from the working class background to the professional class, or more broadly from manual to non-manual jobs), differential returns to education, and in people's

perceptions of their chance of betterment, and so on. Openness and inequalities exist side by side, and the complexity of Hong Kong — Hong Kong as dream and as reality — is vindicated. However, such findings also led us to ask this question: to what extent could structural changes in the society (captured here as openness and inequalities) explain some of the major patterns of the orientations, beliefs and values of the Hong Kong people?[3] Again, to reiterate our earlier question: what is the Hong Kong morality, as it is influenced by the experience of inequality and iniquities, of aspirations and frustrations? And, to pursue the point further, what kind of morality undergirds the social order, and with what consequences?[4]

The Social Indicators project thus aims to chart longitudinally the sense of well-being and the multi-faceted normative territory of the Hong Kong people, with, perhaps, a prospective view to discovering the changes after 1997. The Social Mobility project, on the other hand, is more interested, in a generally retrospective way, in understanding and recording the Hong Kong experience (as it is revealed in the changes of the social structure and class formation), possibly before impending changes transform it out of recognition. However, it occurs to us that both attempts have prodded us into new, uncharted territories. The domain of morality is slippery and ambiguous, with perhaps all of its aspects or concepts being what philosophers called 'essentially contested notions'.[5] Moreover, those skeptical of social sciences (especially the quantitative approach) could say this is a case where social sciences will fail quite miserably, and Art will come to our aid. Statistical carefulness (to paraphrase a character from D.J. Enright's fiction 'Academic Year') could never be a substitute for caring, and as any abstractions from roles (capitalist, worker) or categories (class, party) could never see the individual's world from within, 'from the separate and individual points of view' (Lukes 1985:148), so the social scientist will always find morality slipping away from his fingers. In our present attempt to sketch boldly and perhaps prematurely the Hong Kong morality, we find we occasionally need to have recourse to Art and moral philosophy for assistance, although again there is a paucity of materials. (A social history of literary views remains to be written; but also see Lo 1983; Abbas 1992; Leung 1993.) The advantages are that the observations by men of letters and by tutored tourists are often far more suggestive than what we could possibly glean from figures and findings. They provide insights and illuminations.[6] The disadvantages are that one could not ascertain how much the observation is influenced by the identity of the 'outsider', the 'stranger', or how much the caricature is shaped by the then socio-historical conditions.

In our present research on the ethos and morality of the Hong Kong people, we have to contend ourselves with survey findings, the more fruitful of which are those from the Social Indicators and the Social Mobility projects. In addition, our recent project on the Hong Kong Middle Class attempted to investigate far more systematically the social and economic morality in the society, and in the following discussion, we will be discussing some of its preliminary findings.[7] But in relying on these data, we face a further difficulty: much as we try to interpret the relevant findings in the light of the morality question, our data at best tap the people's sense of inequality and of injustice, and what they entail for mores and character. We know pitifully little about their sense of the right or the good, their conceptions of the good society, their moral-ethical values attached to success and failure, or their notions of obligation or virtue. In other words, much of what we commonly mean by morality is still largely a blank sheet. What we propose to do, given this almost hopeless background, is then ***firstly*** to cull the relevant findings from the noted projects, with a view to providing some springboard to the discussion of morality, and ***secondly***, to suggest in broad strokes what the Hong Kong approach to morality is like. It goes without saying that we are undertaking an exploratory task, and that the subject matter leaves much room for speculation. We do, however, believe the matter to be important enough for justifying informed speculation and theoretical derring-do, attempted for — and perhaps this is

something obligatory for sociologists in the transitional period — reasons of engagement or disengagement.

Individualism and Morality

In the late 1970s, we found the first attempt to grapple with the nature of the Hong Kong society, and the sociological reasons for its stability and prosperity, in the works of S.K. Lau. The concept of 'utilitarian familism' and the general thesis of 'minimally-integrated socio-political framework' were offered to explain the success in the face of an anachronistic, undemocratic colonial governance, and of basically atomized family groups each preoccupied with its own economic betterment.[8] In retrospect, one could argue that underlying the whole discourse are two assumptions. First, social advancement, though highly competitive (and each family has to muster as much resource as possible from family-centric networks), is ultimately not a zero-sum game. This is partly made possible by the scope of freedom (freedom in market, in employment opportunities, etc.) left by the colonial government; but it is also, we believe, a result of a strong social ideology of openness and opportunities, that there is room for betterment. The second assumption is that as locus of loyalties and allegiances, the personal (family and its centripetal networks) always takes precedence over the collective. It is this kind of individualism that Lau increasingly focussed on as his studies gravitated more and more to the normative rather than the organizational aspects of 'familism', resulting in his concept of 'egoistical individualism'.[9]

The argument of 'individualism', however, has two further implications. First, the notion of 'utilitarian' deserves to be amplified. For the instrumental and calculating ethos underlying such notion implies some 'amoral', perhaps even 'anti-moral' (especially in so far as it relates to morality as grounds for practical judgement), approach. If some kind of morality is involved here (though Lau has never explicated its nature), how does it affect the

'individualism' part? Is it a 'utilitarian individualism' some researchers found as morally alarming in modern America, where the 'deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of personal preference', and where 'the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding, constrained only by the requirement that they not interfere with the 'value systems' of others'? (Bellah *et al.*, 1985:6) But these Western researchers also pointed out that such utilitarian individualism is only one of the 'moral' responses found in the contemporary American society. There are other individualistic orientations, and they differ because they draw upon, and emphasize, different resources of the American — biblical and republican — cultural tradition.[10] Our question is: what are the cultural resources upon which the Hong Kong people draw for their articulations of the relation between the private and the public, the personal and the collective, personal preferences and moral imperatives?

The second consideration is with regard to the 'individualism' part. Lau's characterization of the normative orientations and values underlying 'utilitarian familism' bears a strong resemblance to de Tocqueville's individualism. The latter perceived individualism in this way:

> Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of ***family*** and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself. (quoted from Bellah *et al.*, 1985:37; emphasis added)

Isn't this the kind of mores and character an individual will evince in a 'minimally-integrated socio-political system'? The more pertinent issue, however, is the dangers of such individualism. De Tocqueville saw the American individualism as the springhead of the democratic spirit. But at the same time, individualism could lead to isolation (or in modern parlance, 'privatization'), and is thus conducive and vulnerable to despotism. Democratic individ-

ualism is a double-edged sword. Lau's case bespeaks a different moral: the *quid pro quo* spirit, the keeping at arm's length of the 'society' and the 'polity', and by extension, the stability and prosperity of the Hong Kong society, rest as much on the resourcefulness of the Hong Kong brand of familism (nipping the bud of political demands and protests) as on its individualism. And all this in a non-democratic, colonial society. But de Tocqueville's foreboding is also a treatise on fundamental American moral values. Equally we must ask what the Hong Kong people's moral views on rights, freedom and justice are.

There are then two questions: the cultural resources from which one draws ingredients in 'forming' or articulating one's morality; and the more specific views on rights, freedom and justice. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to tackle these two questions directly and fully, let alone adjudge their nuances and primacy. But even if one has the necessary findings from survey studies, some other considerations may be invoked to castigate our attempt. Two considerations are particularly pertinent here. First, it is most likely that there are more than one morality in people. Gallie's discussion of the liberal and the socialist morality is a classic reminder of this point. On nearly every social or political issue discussed in an everyday context by ordinary people, there will be found elements from both moralities. The meritorious individual is countered by the contributing individual; commutative justice by distributive justice; and freedom to get by freedom to be; the moral necessity of free choice and contract by the moral imperative of collective action (Gallie 1956:128). Survey findings often with fixed options would have difficulty in allowing and tapping the 'contradictions'. The second consideration is also suggested by Gallie. For various reasons, moral philosophers would find it difficult to discover what people are morally ***for***, and further, it is only under certain conditions (such as when one's whole way of life is threatened by alien, evil or both forces) that one could discover what people are morally ***against*** (*ibid*:131-2). In this light, survey study perhaps needs more than its normal share of 'opportune' or 'auspicious' time.

If we forge further ahead, it would thus not be out of ignorance but rather foolhardiness. In the following, we will first of all outline some of the relevant areas covered by our studies. In our view, there are in particular two areas where our survey findings can throw some light on the Hong Kong morality, or better, the Hong Kong approach to morality. These two areas are beliefs in openness and opportunities, on the one hand, and sense of inequality and injustice, on the other. We would argue that as these domains of beliefs and values evince strain and hope, straddle the personal and the collective, and, as they bear on the issue of objective and subjective freedom (as in Hegel's civil society), they could furnish a basis for our musings over the morality question.

Class, Morality and the Hong Kong Experience

We have argued elsewhere in greater detail (Lui and Wong 1993; Wong 1992b) that the beliefs in Hong Kong as a place of unmatched openness and opportunities — some cornerstone of the 'Hong Kong experience' — probably did not have an auspicious beginning. Structural changes in the society, with expanding 'room at the top', creating opportunites and facilitating upward mobility, have wrought important changes in perceptions and preferences. The 'Hong Kong experience', as generally understood, probably did not come to fruition until the 1970s. When we compare the relevant findings from the survey studies in the late 1960s, with those in the 1980s, we find quite dramatic changes. The following shows some of these changes. (The details of the cited studies can be found in Wong 1992b.)

Table 1 Opportunites and Evaluation of Mobility in Society (%)

	Mitchell 1967	Lau 1977	Lau 1986	SI 1988
Per cent who opted to stay in Hong Kong despite opportunity elsewhere	23	53		
Per cent who saw themselves as having higher status than parents	31		37	44
Per cent who saw themselves as having lower status than parents	36		11	12

* The studies are:
Mitchell 1967: The Urban Family Life Survey; source Mitchell 1969.
Lau 1977: Urban Hong Kong Survey; source Lau 1982.
Lau 1986: Pilot Study of Social Indicators Study; source Lau and Wan 1987.
SI1988: The Social Indicators Study 1988; source Lau *et al.* 1991.

It is clear that in relation to the belief in Hong Kong as a land of opportunities, and to the evaluation of one's betterment as compared with one's parents, there have been significant changes. In particular, the perception of the society as providing the best environment for one's career is probably quite deeply-ingrained. The above table shows that the proportion of those who opted to stay in Hong Kong, despite the availability of opportunities elsewhere, has more than doubled in the decade following the late 1960s. In the Middle Class project in 1992, we asked 590 randomly selected respondents this question: 'Would you agree with this view: that no matter what will happen politically here, Hong Kong will remain the best place for developing my career/business.' An overwhelming majority agreed to the statement. A further attempt to thematize the Social Indicators findings shows that the subscription to the openness belief dimension is not affected by age, sex or place of birth. Class makes a small, but noteworthy, difference (Wong 1992a). More specifically, when our respondents are asked about the essential social condition for mobility and

success, freedom to compete and to choose employment is regarded as more important than 'formal' guarantees of welfare or equality of opportunity in say education (Wong 1991:161).

At the personal level, it has also been argued that there is an almost sacrosanct status attached to freedom (Lau and Kuan 1988:47). To most Hong Kong people, one of the functions of the law is to safeguard people's right to choose their own moral criteria. And freedom of speech is given overriding significance (*ibid*). But Lau and Kuan were quick to point out that this espousal of freedom does not mean an acceptance of some universal principles with absolute binding power. The value placed on freedom is part and parcel of what they called 'situational morality'. It is something held less as a universal moral value or imperative as something which happens to be both 'right' and useful, thus implicating particularistic and contextual concerns.[11] Its role is not as a moral driving force justifying commitment, straddling the private and the public; nor is it simply a matter of personal preference. The value of freedom is seen as making possible success, both the personal and the societal, and its moral worthiness and binding ethical implications, though immanent, take a back seat, so to say, to the more obvious and more utilitarian importance. In his everyday life considerations (what he is morally for, perhaps), the Hong Kong Man somewhat resembles the cynic in Oscar Wilde's words: 'a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing'. The Hong Kong Man does know, and does care about, we believe, the 'value' of certain things (of which more later), but there is an important element of cynicism in the way he, as it were, shelves (or 'brackets', to use the phenomenological term) moral imperatives.

There seems to be some obverse support of our hypothesis in the way Hong Kong people perceive individual rights. Rights are evaluated in broadly commutative terms. For instance, it was found in the Social Indicators survey that a majority of the respondents saw rights as rewards given by society to people who deservedly earned them. Depending on the situation, and on the primacy of the issues to the respondent, rights could and should

be taken away from individuals. Lau and Kuan argued that such low level of tolerance for the rights of others is largely due to the absence of a libertarian cultural tradition in the society.[12] Relentless competition and, we would add, strong espousal of an openness and opportunities ideology, undermine social trust and make personal trust an incessant process of 'shelving' moral claims and pushing utilitarian deals and agreements.

That positive values are placed on capitalistic sentiments and practice is further reflected in the Middle Class findings. The socio-economic ethos of the respondents were tapped in the form of seven sets of questions. Each set was comprised of two statements, each capturing or representing a distinct and 'extreme' position on the value of certain socio-economic arrangements. The respondent was asked to express his view by choosing a position on a seven-point scale, with the two statements occupying the opposite ends, and the middle point indicating 'neutrality'.[13] The following represents three questions on capitalistic ethos and on the conception of the 'good society'.

1a. 'Hong Kong is a profit-oriented society, and it instils in one positive values of hard-work and strong achievement.'
1b. 'Hong Kong is a profit-oriented society, and it makes people greedy and selfish.'

2a. 'Be it in regard to studies, work or business, competition will bring about benefits for all.'
2b. 'Be it in regard to studies, work or business, competition will only result in wasteful and vicious rivalries.'

3a. 'A good society is one where there is equality of opportunity, so that every one has a chance to better his livelihood.'
3b. 'A good society is one where regardless of one's ability and education, every one can have equal incomes.'

The majority of the respondents — with little class difference between the top salaried professionals and the manual workers —

espoused a capitalistic profit-orientation and also believed in the positive consequence of competition. In their conception of the 'good society', they also regarded equality of opportunity as more important than equality of conditions (statement 3a and 3b). These survey findings thus lend support to observations of a more literary and cultural slant. For instance, Abbas, in his introduction to a collection of poems by Ye Si, observed that the fabled energy and vitality of Hong Kong is directed towards only one end, that of the economic sphere.[14] It is a form of decadence ('shorn of all moralistic and *fin-de-siècle* overtones') where

> the only form of political idealism that has a chance is that which can go together with economic self-interest, when "freedom" for example could be made synonymous with the "free market". (Abbas 1992:5)

The ideology of openness and opportunities thus not only encourages hard-work and achievement motivation, but also fosters a highly economistic, utilitarian and amoral approach to ethical values.

But at the same time, we could also note that (bearing in mind that there are moments when unwritten values create culture) there are some underlying, yet-to-be-specified, values to that amorality. We mentioned earlier that quite unmistakably, to the majority of the local people, Hong Kong has been identified as the best place for them to build their business or career, regardless of what will happen politically in the future. Immediately following that question, we asked if they would agree with the following statement:

> Compared with other societies, there is little that is good about Hong Kong, except that it is easy to make money here.

Table 2 and 3 respectively give the distribution of responses by class to these two questions.

Table 2 Hong Kong as Best Place for Career by Class (N=590; %)

Class*	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I	67	17	16
II	69	18	13
III	74	13	13
IV	85	10	5
V	86	9	5
VI	71	9	20
VII	75	8	17

Question: 'Would you agree with this view: that no matter what will happen politically here, Hong Kong will remain the best place for developing my career/business.'

* Class I: Higher-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; managers in large establishments; large proprietors.

Class II: Lower-grade profesionals, administrators, and officials; higher-grade technicians; managers in small establishments; supervisors of nonmanual employees.

Class III: Routine nonmanual employees in administration and commerce (especially clerical workers); personal service workers often in menial work.

Class IV: Petite bourgeoisie; small proprietors or artisans with or without employees.

Class V: Technicians, supervisors of manual workers.

Class VI: Skilled manual workers.

Class VII: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers.

Table 3 Hong Kong as Place for Making Money by Class (N=590; %)

Class*	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I	27	68	5
II	39	58	3
III	37	58	5
IV	44	49	7
V	40	56	4
VI	54	39	7
VII	52	40	8

Question: 'Would you agree with this view: compared with other societies, there is little that is good about Hong Kong, except that it is easy to make money here.'

* See notes to Table 2.

From Table 2, we could see that on the first statement (Hong Kong is still a place of great economic opportunities), an overwhelming proportion of the respondents agreed, regardless of class position. When it came to the second statement (economic opportunities and profit-making are all that there is to Hong Kong), a significant proportion of the respondents disagreed, with a clear majority especially in the more privileged classes (see Table 3). It seems, therefore, that other than (or beyond) the 'economic self-interest' and capitalistic ethos, there is something else, something more ephemeral and abstract. We further posed to our respondents in the Middle Class study two questions on 'stability and prosperity':

> Nowadays many people are talking about "prosperity" and "stability". Which do you think is more important: economic prosperity or social stability? and
>
> Suppose there is a society where there is no war and no instability, but where there are unfair things such as wealth disparity and lack of freedom of speech. If there

is such a place, would you be willing to live in such a society?

In regard to the first question, an overwhelming proportion chose 'social stability' over 'economic prosperity'. However, in response to the second question, a great majority unequivocally chose ***not*** to live in the hypothetical Nirvana. There is then perhaps another strand to the Hong Kong people's conception of the 'good society', one which perhaps is overlaid and overshadowed by the economistic mentality and amoral pragmatism, but which has its own 'sub-soil' existence and tenacity, and takes more the form of 'morally against' than 'morally for'. At this stage, we still do not fully understand the nature and nuances of this morality. It could be as much about an amorphous, unexplicated or nascent feeling or affinity for the 'Hong Kong way of life', as about more specific leanings towards some liberal position where one of the precepts must be 'society and authority must allow scope for the individual to exercise initiative and choice'. But there should be little doubt that these are real and portentous values and considerations forged — alongside with the amorality and the decadence — by the Hong Kong experience of openness and opportunities.

In the above, we have tried to sketch out areas where the beliefs underlying the 'Hong Kong Dream' have helped to shed light on the Hong Kong morality. Co-existing with these beliefs, however, are some equally deeply-ingrained perceptions and values with regard to social inequality and social injustice. The following table shows the persistence of such strain in relation to some selected areas of life.

Table 4 Strain and Pessimism (%)

	Mitchell 1967	C and P 1969	King 1972	Lau 1977	SM 1989	SI 1990
Per cent who saw chance for career development as great	16					12
Per cent who felt they could do nothing about unjust government or society			82	91		
Per cent who felt employees were being taken advantage of	25*	61†			31§	

The studies are (again, the details are in Wong 1992b):
Mitchell 1967: see notes to Table 1.
C and P 1969: Chaney and Podmore, Young Adults Study; source Chaney and Podmore 1973.
King 1972: King, Life Quality Study; source King 1972.
Lau 1977: see notes to Table 1.
SM 1989: Social Mobility Study; source Wong and Lui 1992a.
SI 1990: Social Indicators Project; source Wong 1992a.

* Mitchell's question is: 'Do you think that people having your qualifications and work experience should be paid more, less or about the same, as you are receiving now?' The percentage refers to people who said they should be paid more.

† Chaney and Podmore's question is: 'Do you think that working people are fairly and equally treated by their employers, or that employers take advantage of them?' The percentage refers to people who said employees are being taken advantage of.

§ The question in the social mobility study is: 'Do you agree with the view that if bosses are to make profits, they have to exploit workers?'

It is obvious that these three questions tap quite differently the respondent's sense of distributive justice. We provide these figures to serve as general indicative signposts.

What is striking about the findings is that, in contrast to the burgeoning optimism about Hong Kong as a land of opportunities, there is a persistent sense of strain and pessimism. The small percentage of those who saw their chance for career development

is particularly telling; it has hardly changed from the turbulent and difficult years of the mid-1960s. The disparity between an optimistic belief in the openness of and the opportunities in the society, and a pessimistic appraisal of one's chance for career development, both of which we find ample evidence for, has been discussed elsewhere (Wong 1991; 1992a). The issue, however, does not rest with optimism and pessimism. For the pessimistic (or realistic) evaluation is part of a strain, embedded in the personal experience of the individual, and expressed in things ranging from failure to derive satisfaction from one's work, seeing conflicts between the haves and the haves-not as inevitable, seeing the big corporations as having too much power, to the view that there is much inequality in mobility chance between different classes, and to a pervasive sense of political impotence (Lau and Kuan 1988; Wong and Lui 1992a; Wong 1992a). And there is hardly any divergence in these views caused by age, sex, place of birth, education and (though with some caveats) class (see Wong 1991; Lui and Wong 1993). Thus, to the extent that there is a disjunction between the social ideology of openness and optimism, on the one hand, and the personal experience of iniquities and barriers, on the other, it seems important for us to, first, know the reason for it, and, secondly, to draw out the likely implications for values and orientations to morality.[15]

First, if personal experience (the strain) is not a reliable guidepost to the nature of the social ideology (the optimism and economically dynamic spirit), how is one to explain the chasm? We do not profess to know the answer. But, to take the discussion to another plane, there are, we believe, structural reasons for the co-existence of both hope and strain. Our Social Mobility study has, among other things, pointed to the great amount of mobility or fluidity, especially when taken in an inter-generational context. About 60% of the service classes (broadly the upper and lower professional occupations) are upwardly mobile 'newcomers', some traversing a long-distance mobility trajectory. The expansion of the 'room at the top' undoubtedly contributed to the availability of opportunities and thereby shaping the Hong Kong

mobility regime (Wong and Lui 1992a; Chan, Lui and Wong 1993). The social history of that expansion and its effects on the Hong Kong people's values, ethos and morality is yet to be taken as a big agenda, for which studies utilizing different methods and timeframes are obviously needed. But pending such a study, we think it not unreasonable to say that this experience is the structural basis of the social ideology. On the other hand, our mobility analysis has also revealed significant differentials in mobility chance, be it short-range or long-range, intra-generational or inter-generational. Moreover, structural analysis of the mobility table suggests that there are pockets of greater rigidity in the class structure, with an invidious barrier broadly separating the non-manual and the manual classes (Wong and Lui 1992b:62-70). We cannot enter into a discussion of the implications of these findings for class formation or the demographic and socio-political characteristics of different classes. We hope however that such structural differentials could go some way to illuminating the personal experience or sense of inequality and injustice. Both openness and inequalities are revealed in the social structure, and as people enter and benefit differently from its changes, their orientations are likewise moulded.

But what are the implications of these processes and patterns for morality? We offer the following preliminary thoughts. First, the Hong Kong Man is not a simple-minded, happy-go-lucky Horatio Alger hero; he is not taken in by unbound opportunities and optimism, or the ethical correctness of diligence and industry. Though the chance of success is believed to be always there, the experience of failure (either in one's own or in others' experience) is equally immanent. The hard-headed approach to inequality, conflict and injustice is a testament to such cognition and experience. This results in a social imagery which has more than a trace of fatalism. The following table shows the class responses to the reason for poverty.

Table 5 Reason for Poverty by Class (N=590; %)

Class*	Strongly agree/Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/Disagree	Don't know
I	54	4	39	3
II	53	11	26	10
III	60	14	22	4
IV	71	4	22	3
V	84	12	4	0
VI	74	9	14	3
VII	77	6	9	8

Question: 'Do you agree with this view: that one main reason for poverty is that, in every society, some people are bound to be at the bottom, and others at the top.'

* See notes to Table 2.

The majority believes that there are bound to be some who occupy the lower depths of the society; and we find further that most of the respondents place the blame for failures not on the government or its policies, but on the individual himself. If poverty and the attendant social hierarchy represent an inevitable state of affairs, then it is not surprising to find that the Hong Kong people are demanding the government to take up more 'obligatory welfare' functions (Lau and Kuan 1988). But the clamour for a more (restrictivist) interventionist government does not, it seems to us, feed on a moral outrage over inequality or injustice *per se*. Government services are essentially palliatives, and ultimately the Hong Kong people are not interested in social palliatives. Partly because there is a certain stoicism; it is as if the Hong Kong people seriously take heed of Oakeshott's advice to those imparting political education: 'The world is the best of all possible worlds, and ***everything*** in it is a necessary evil' (Oakeshott 1956:21; original emphasis). Partly also because of the belief in opportunities: there is no mistake that there is inequality of conditions, and, worse,

there is also inequality of opportunity; of course, it is desirable to have greater equality in that respect, and the government should assist the poor and destitute, for they could have failed and faltered for reasons with which one could sympathize. But ultimately one has to attend to one's business, there being no use to shower the failures with sympathy. And even if help is not forthcoming, one copes and gets by in different ways. As it is believed that there are opportunities in the society, there is always the chance that one could make it by dint of enterprise or luck. The moral implications of fatalism and pessimism are thus counteracted by a brand of utopianism, if by that term one means a combination of pessimism with the present and optimism in the future.[16]

Secondly, let us deal with 'utilitarian individualism' again. It is obvious that when interpreted as self-driven, even selfish, interest, it has been the hallmark of the Hong Kong ethos. There is generally a clear sign of an individualistic orientation, whether it is a matter of mobility strategy or of a coping method with problems in different domains of life (see Wong and Lui 1992a). The freedom to get is prized more than the freedom to be, and 'expressive individualism' has not struck deep roots.[17] And indeed there has been a good deal of openness and opportunities in the society for these orientations to work, to bring results. The moral question for individualism is this: is it possible that the separate, individualistic, selfish decisions could ever congeal into some aggregate form of social justice? This of course is classic utilitarianism, found in Bentham and Franklin. Through the invisible hand, greater good and justice could be created for all if only the individual is free to 'exercise initiative and choice'. For the Hong Kong people, this question is a non-issue. As long as there is room for their individually selfish decisions and efforts to bear fruit, then things are fine. Even if competition sometimes gets too tough, as when one's livelihood or security is threatened, one simply strikes out on a different path, or better, several paths at the same time. One applies for a foreign passport and, at the same time, diverts one's liquid capital to mainland China. The endeavour to maintain

one's social position, or to become upwardly mobile, is of course limited by the opportunity structure of the society. The unique feature of Hong Kong is perhaps that the parameters of its opportunity structure could only be partially captured by mobility table analysis, or enumerations of job vacancies. The unique position, not to mention the economic and political vicissitudes attendant on its development, has provided a multifarious, time- and space-arrayed structure of opportunities probably unmatched elsewhere.[18] Given such a situation, the Hong Kong response to morality is very much like — to have recourse to Art — the stare bestowed by poverty on certain wealth, in a society of disparate riches and increasing moral and aesthetic hardening: 'curious, mild and impersonal' (Enright 1955:12). The moral implications of the individually selfish decisions and efforts — of oneself and of others — the Hong Kong people hardly care. In the Middle Class study, we asked the respondents if they would agree with this statement:

> Some people in our society are earning much more than others, and this is the unfair feature of our social institutions.

The majority disagreed. We then asked if they would agree with the following:

> Letting the rich earn as much as possible is beneficial to all.

The majority agreed. These findings together suggest that inequality of outcomes is perceived as not morally disturbing, and that rather than implying a subscription to a functionalist position on social justice (the rich and capable as creating a bigger pie which eventually, through a trickle-down effect, will benefit the least advantaged),[19] the economic culture of the Hong Kong people betokens the social ideology of openness and opportunities: the big pie concept as not so much a matter of economic calculus as an acclimatised reality, a way of life, where one could (or is wont to) 'exercise initiative and choice'.[20]

This particular brand of instrumental (but not simply economistic) morality could perhaps be further illustrated by three examples. Emigration, the decision to leave or not, as one of the many privatized ways Hong Kong people cope with the larger issues and changes in the society, is similarly not perceived in terms that have any bearing on the good, the right, or conversely, the morally suspect or the morally uncomfortable.[21] Work, to take another example, is perceived as invidious and seems to be undertaken in an instrumental manner. At one level, such instrumentalism seems equivalent to money-mindedness; it is only the money aspect of the job which interests the worker. But it is possible that money represents the only desirable feature of menial and monotonous work. At another level, work is not just 'putting in' time; work is meaningful because it helps to support the family which is important. As we put it elsewhere, meaning and money are compatible (see Lui 1992b).[22] But what is more pertinent to our concerns here is that much of the debate over instrumentalism vs collectivism in the Hong Kong worker's attitudes to work clouds the fact that such a debate only makes sense when there is a tradition of moral importance placed on work: the right to work, and the workplace- and community-nurtured moral sentiments. It is only against this moral tradition that the 'instrumentalists' could lash the depraved character of work and the colonial-capitalist order, and the 'collectivists' chasten the liberal and expand on the room of improvement in labour-management relations. We do not believe that there is this tradition in Hong Kong.[23] Even with drastic changes resulting in mass unemployment among the stable, nonmanual occupations, people would still regard their situation as unlucky rather than unjust. At least, the moral implications of that injustice are relegated to the background as the search for alternatives begins. In comparison, when the American middle class members faced a protracted recession and were forced out of their jobs they found themselves, as one scholar put it, 'falling from grace' (Newman 1988). The feeling of injustice and its impact on American individualism are much greater and have more far-reaching consequences.

Lastly, we also think there is little morality embedded in the way the Hong Kong people perceive and evaluate political authority. The legitimacy of the colonial government is in a sense an academic issue. The older generation escaped from one political regime not so much to endorse or trust another, as to make a living for themselves and for their children. Even the younger generation seems to have identified more with their society as a way of life than as a place of residence, with all the associated imageries, values and allegiances (Wong 1992). Political failures are treated like social failures: momentary curiosity and sympathy perhaps, but quickly forgotten. One must get on, to something new, and perhaps, to some better life-station.

This 'getting on', to make a living and perhaps a better living, shapes the Hong Kong approach to morality. And it is so perhaps because it is a society where, as Jan Morris put it, 'there are no class inhibitions... almost everyone shares the memory of old hardships, if only by heredity, and almost everyone has similar aspirations' (Morris 1988:196). The Hong Kong mood is 'one of masterly expedience and crisis-to-crisis adjustment and recovery. It is partly a gambler's mentality, partly fatalism' (Hughes 1976:129). In relation to greater events which might be politically and morally troubling, Hong Kong perseveres to carve out a small corner for herself. As Coates observed:

> ...[W]hile, on the other side of the border, a civil war of world importance might rage, people in Hong Kong were able to pursue their own small personal wars, undeterred by greater events. To anyone interested in these greater events, life in Hong Kong was lived in two dimensions: a large dimension, in which the individual was, like Hong Kong itself, a dot; and a small dimension, in which ridiculously small local matters seemed very important. (Coates 1975:4)

And to those Chinese men of letters who have greater culture and greater concerns in their blood, Hong Kong was to be castigated, both for her lack of culture and for her amorality.[24] One writer in the 1940s lashed in this way:

> A corner cannot represent a world; a fragment cannot symbolize a pattern. When I am stranded in this famous and beautifully-named city, and have the time to see its streets — oh, how I loathe its din and foulness. (Wen 1940, quoted in Lo 1983:192; our translation)

In her preface to Alan Birch's book, *The Colony that Never Was*, Morris asked, with reference to the 1997 question: what other place in the world could contemplate a finite future? To which we could perhaps answer: a place and a people without moral ***angst***.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have argued that some of the current studies of Hong Kong society must sooner or later be confronted with the question of the morality of its people. We attempt to show that while there are real limitations in our data and in the social scientific approach to the question, there are also areas, in both the study of the Hong Kong ethos and the study of class inequality, that could serve as a springboard to a discussion, however partial and tentative, of the Hong Kong morality. We have presented — not very scientifically and yet not literary enough — a picture of pragmatic and generally amoral attitude towards success and failure, hopes and frustrations. The moral fibres underlying the affinity with the Hong Kong way of life are yet to be teased out and studied in detail. The amorality (or as some would prefer, the decadence) stands out, although we believe there are integuments, however tenuous and subaltern, that make for a ***moral*** basis of change and resistance. Just as an acceptance of one's life-fate (be it living conditions or career-stage) does not mean legitimation of the *status quo*, so the amorality does not necessarily betoken a lack of moral reserves. The Hong Kong Man perhaps fits Bernard Williams' description of the amoralist: one who has intermittent and capricious engagement in moral considerations. But, as Williams points out, to move the amoralist to the moral plane does not involve a different kind of thought or experience. It

is more a matter of extending his 'sympathies', so that he could imagine interests of some people being violated. This will involve him (if only with a shaky hold) in the world of moral considerations, in the form of notions of fairness. To use Williams' metaphorical illustration, the vital thought is something like 'they need help' rather than 'I like them and they need help' (Williams 1976:25). From this vantage point, Hong Kong's reaction to the Chinese students during the June 4th events is perhaps not an entirely fortuitous reminder of this point. We need to know more about the moral basis of outrage as well as of quiescence. And we hope that our attempt has at least convinced the reader of the importance of this question.

Notes

1. See Wong (1992b) for a review of subjective indicators studies in Hong Kong in the past twenty-five years.
2. See Lui and Wong (1993) for a further discussion.
3. See Wong and Levin (forthcoming) for a more general interpretation of the Hong Kong social structure.
4. Recent discussions of the social order of the society (Scott 1989; Wong 1992), as either facing a legitimacy crisis or denuded by the socio-economic consequences of emigration, unavoidably beg the following questions: What is the nature of the moral order of the society? What are its components and strands, and what is its structural context? See Wong and Levin (forthcoming) and Wong (1992b) for a preliminary foray into the topic.
5. We hope it is not entirely facetious to quote Berlin (on the concept of liberty or freedom) in our defence: '[But] the vagueness of the concepts, and the multiplicity of the criteria involved, is an attribute of the suject-matter itself, not of our imperfect method of measurement, or incapacity for precise thought' (Berlin 1968: 130).
6. As one who tries to theorize about society in concrete human terms (viz. emotions, perceptions, fears, etc.), Sennett has to concede that '[I]t is a common reproach that one can learn more about the complexity of motives and mutual perception from a reasonably good novel than from a "solid" piece of social-science research' (Sennett 1981:9).
7. The Hong Kong Middle Class research (1992-) is part of the Middle Class in East Asian Societies project coordinated by Michael Hsiao at the Academica Sinica, Taipei. The larger project is a study of the middle class in Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong. National reports are near completion and will be published later in book form.
8. See Wong and Lui (1992a) for a discussion of Lau's conception of the Hong Kong social structure.
9. See Lau and Kuan (1988).
10. For further discussion, see, *inter alia*, Wolfe (1991), Newman (1988); or cf. earlier works by Sennett and Cobb (1972) and Crozier (1984).
11. The concept of 'situational morality' is one of the very few discussions in the local literature on the relation between ethos and orientations, on the one hand, and the Hong Kong morality, on the other. We have some reservations about the concept, partly because it has not been thought out more fully, and partly because the evidence Lau and Kuan adduced to vindicate its existence and primacy remains weak (see Lau and Kuan, 1988:49-50).
12. Obviously, there is much that we do not know about the Hong Kong people's conception of 'rights'.
13. This method is commonly used in surveys of values and ethos. An example whose concerns are similar to ours is McClosky and Zaller (1984). See also Scholzman and Verba (1979). As the full implications of the findings from the Middle Class study await more in-depth analyses, our present argument represents a preliminary interpretation.
14. It is worth quoting another insightful observer of Hong Kong, Jan Morris, who was left in wonderment by the 'energy and vitality' of the society, as she contemplated at the city's waterfronts:

> The air is likely to be rich and humid, the sky is lit with brooding glow of a great city's lights, blotting out the stars. It does not matter where I am, Kowloon or Hong Kong-side; around me always, beyond the little pool of quiet I have made for myself on the bench or bollard, the huge endless stir of the place, the roar of the traffic, the passing of the ships, the comings and goings of the ferries, combine into one gigantic sensa-

> tion of communal energy. For the most part, I know very well, it is not energy expended in any very high-flown purpose, but still its rumble and motion move me, and I sat there gnawing my chicken, drinking my San Miguel from the can, more or less entranced. (Morris, 1988:72-3)

15. See Scholzman and Verba (1979) for a theoretical discussion of the nature and implications of a chasm between social ideology and personal experience.
16. On liberalism and utopianism, see Arblaster and Lukes (1971).
17. See Bellah *et al.* (1985) for a discussion of 'expressive individualism'.
18. It is of course obvious that not every one could take advantage of the opportunities. One must hold strictures against economistic ideology or optimism.
19. This functionalist position is part and parcel of the functionalist theory of social stratification. We feel that it is a topic which previous studies of Hong Kong society have, regretfully, neglected. A recent British study by Marshall and his associates (see Swift *et al.*, 1992) tackled this problem, and the preliminary findings are immensely interesting. One wishes there were more attempts in Hong Kong for such theoretically-oriented endeavous.
20. The bearing of socio-economic ethos and preferrences on the make-up of morality is undoubtedly important; unfortunately, we cannot enter into a discussion here. In this connection, a study of the similarities and differences between such ethos among the Chinese societies of Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China will prove indispensable to an understanding of the way modernization and development contribute to the formation of Chinese identities and moralities.
21. A recent finding (available after the paper was written) from a survey on emigration from Hong Kong supports our view. It was found that, in response to a question on the moral rightness/wrongness of emigration, most evinced a 'tolerant' attitude: about 56% of the sample adopted a neutral stance. I am grateful to S.L. Wong for allowing me to quote this information from his unpublished paper 'Hong Kong Emigration to Australia' (1993). In general, there is a paucity of narratives on emigration; but see Kwong (1990) and Wong (1992). Also, Wilson made the observation that 'Hong Kong executives naturally expect to continue running their business and making money from them, while they are going through the citizenship or naturalization process' (1990:235).
22. Findings on work and work values from the Middle Class project largely confirmed our views.
23. Data from the 1990 Social Indicators study suggest that few Hong Kong Chinese perceive their work in moral terms. Working people take work seriously but they do not work for the sake of searching for some intrinsic rewards in the work activity itself. Work is mundane, practical; it is not perceived as a 'calling' or any grand moral purpose (see Lui 1992b). For a review of the debate between instrumentalism and collectivism, see Levin (1990) and Lui (1992a). Both Levin and Lui have pointed out that instrumentalism and collectivism are by no means mutually exclusive.
24. See Leung (1993) for some cultural observations on the attitudes of the Chinese men of letters to Hong Kong.

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道德、階級與香港的生活方式

黃偉邦　呂大樂著

（中文摘要）

本文旨在提出在現階段的香港研究裏，實有必要將香港人的道德概念作一整體及結構性的剖析。近年幾項有關港人的心態、意向及價值取向的研究都不約而同揭露了一般學者對香港人的道德精神面貌，及其與香港獨有的生活方式的關係，缺乏一深入的瞭解。本文檢視了近年研究的量化資料，認識到以此類資料去探討道德價值這問題的不足及限制。但同時也嘗試在此不足的基礎上去描繪香港道德形態的梗概，希望對將來較深邃的概念分析及實證研究能起一點刺激作用。

文中的論述可分兩方面。一方面，香港戰後的發展製造了不少晉昇的機會，社會的開放及流動經驗使港人視香港為一充滿機會的地方。此種樂觀情緒變成一種對機會及成功的可即性的信念，也構成「香港經驗」在意識層面上的一重要特徵。這種意識成為香港人資本主義價值觀的一部份。對成功的追求、機會的把握、競爭的自然性，香港人表現了一種極個人化，甚至自私、貪婪、純效益考慮的現實取向。社會的自由或平等的重要性決定於它們是否有助於實現「香港夢」；這些理想的道德涵義及對個人意識與行為的相關性、規範性變得次要。但當被問及是否願意生活在一個安定繁榮，但沒有言論自由及貧富懸殊的社會時，大部份人都表示不願意。這或顯示了港人是重視一個全面開放及有一定程度公義的社會；純粹現實或經濟的考慮固然重要，但一個能容許個人自由及自決地在各方面抉擇及發揮所長的「理想社會」同樣重要。在功利個人主義後，隱約呈現對自由與社會公義的一種道德憧憬。

另外一方面，香港的發展經驗也有其黑暗的一面。雖然社會上成功例子不少，但也有失敗的事例。要成功也要付出代價。大

部份人對於個人事業發展的評估變得審慎，甚至悲觀。社會流動過程中的不平等是一因素。在對流動機會充滿希望的情況下，其實存在階級的矛盾與衝突。在個人的層次上，這表現成一種對社會及政治的無奈感。有機會就要掌握，香港人無暇理會他人的成功或失敗，更遑論去思考個人行為的社會或道德後果。如果沒有機會，那明天或許會更好。這種看透世情，但不厭世而玩世的世俗心態理念，與香港獨特的生活方式渾然一體，相通而不隔。但香港人的精神資源亦未必囿於這種「無道德」形態。對一個全面性開放，容許人人「效其能、盡其性」的社會也有一定的信念支持，而人心的變調，則更有其道德的基礎。