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Social Welfare and Women

The Dominant Approach and the Feminist Critique

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The Dominant Approach and the Feminist Critique

In any review of the historical development of social welfare services for women in Hong Kong, two strands emerge as dominant: the prevalence of the need paradigm and the feminist critique. Social amelioration remains a central concern in the delivery of social welfare in Hong Kong, and social welfare as an institution is based on the principle of need (Titmuss, 1976; Mishra, 1981). Since 1971, while there has been constant and significant expansion in the provision of social welfare services, most of the services have been need-driven. During the final decades of colonial rule, a high proportion of social welfare services were directed towards meeting the needs of women. According to the Clientele Information System of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), the majority of clients in the areas of services for family and children, the elderly, and elderly people receiving welfare and specialized services (new arrivals and single parents) are women (AAF, 2003). Up until recently, however, women have been treated no differently from any other client group by the welfare system.

In the late 1980s, feminists developed a critique of Hong Kong society. This critique was characterized by attacks on society's patriarchal structure and on attitudes and practices in such tendencies as sex-role stereotyping, the subordination, inequality, and oppression of women, and in discrimination against them. In some cases, this critique led to action and resulted in some changes, particularly in the sphere of women's rights. Social welfare also came under scrutiny and was found wanting. In feminist analyses it was contended that the colonial state had made some progress when it expanded social welfare services in the 1970s (AAF, 2003). However, the state lacked a gender perspective in the provision of social welfare services and the "unintended consequences of many of these policies exact a heavy toll on women" (Kwok et al., 1997:251). Further, social policy in Hong Kong failed to "socialize the privatized labor of women

under patriarchal relationship in the household" (ibid). Importantly, feminists were critical of the colonial government's disposition to treat social policy as a gender-free or gender-neutral zone, and to ignore the gender impact of policy choices. They further observed that all social policy outcomes in terms of social protection, equality and poverty had implications for gender equality or for lessening gender inequality. All in all, they contended that the colonial social policy was problematic and needed to be replaced by a policy that respected and implemented feminist principles of equality (i.e., the adoption of a feminist or women-centred approach to social policy). Specifically, finding that household responsibilities and a familial ideology had hampered Hong Kong women from participating in public affairs, some feminists argued that the government had an important role to play in alleviating the burden of housewives by providing more welfare services (Chan et al., 1985; Chan, 2002). Although some headway has been made in actual practice, the major achievement of the feminist critique has been to expose the inadequacies of the current welfare system.

In light of these two strands in its history, this paper assesses the development of social welfare services for women in Hong Kong. We argue that the colonial state espoused a residual model of welfare, relying mainly on familial support, occupational welfare, and individual effort. Even after the rapid expansion of welfare in the 1970s, the colonial state did not single out women as a special client group. Although the post-colonial government has recently declared its intention to maintain a gender perspective in public policy, only limited advances in social policy have thus far been made. As Hong Kong moved into an "era of [fiscal] constraint" in the wake of the Asian financial crisis (1997) and the huge fiscal deficits that followed (Chau and Wong, 2002), some women have been finding it increasingly difficult to find services to meet their needs. The services provided and the policies adopted by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and women's groups will be discussed in this paper. The paper will emphasize the feminist approach to providing such services and the arguments put forward by women's groups.

Colonial Social Policies and the Feminist Critique

In social welfare policy, the colonial leaders wanted to maintain a minimal state presence in Hong Kong. They preferred to rely mainly on family networks, individual effort, and occupational benefits to meet social needs (Tang, 1998). There was to be little social intervention to assist the needy. In its first White Paper on Social Welfare (Hong Kong Government, 1965), the colonial government defended its position by placing the responsibility for helping those in need on the family and on the voluntary sector. A few points were regularly made to justify this stance of non-action. The colonial government argued that social welfare was not common even in other countries, and that it believed that Chinese families felt that they had a duty to look after members who were in trouble. Furthermore, the population in Hong Kong had been a transient one immediately before and after the Second World War, rendering programmes to aid the poor useless and even incurring the risk of attracting very large number of people from mainland China.

This residual model of social non-interventionism had been in use by the colonial government since 1842. It was not until the early 1970s that social welfare made a "great leap forward" and the government, under the leadership of Governor MacLehose, began providing social welfare services to the needy on a much larger scale. The key factor leading up to this was the massive riots in 1966-1967, which posed the most serious challenge thus far to the legitimacy of the colonial government and forced it to respond to the territory's massive social needs (Tang, 1998). Governor MacLehose's plan for social reform gave centre stage to housing, education, medical and health, and social welfare. He expressed the view that these four areas would be the pillars to support the future well-being of the community. In the area of social welfare, public assistance and social allowances for the disabled and the elderly were introduced in the early 1970s. The key policy paper, *Social Welfare in Hong Kong: The Way Ahead*, was published in 1973 (Social Welfare Department, 1973). A number of other policy documents (e.g., White Paper on Rehabilitation, Green Papers on Elderly and Social Security, and Programme Plan

for Youth) were also produced (Hong Kong Government, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d). A new social welfare planning machinery was introduced: the Five Year Plan setting out the policy objectives governing the provision and future development of social welfare services, the specific targets of expansion for each service area, and alternative measures to alleviate shortfalls in the provision of services. New social welfare services programmes were later put in place in 1977: school social work, outreach youth services, special services for the disabled and the elderly, as well as the expansion of social and recreational facilities. Scholars called the decade of the 1970s the "golden era" in the development of social security and social welfare services in Hong Kong (Chow, 1984).

The thinking underlying these rapid developments was the need paradigm, which the colonial government had adopted. The approach in this paradigm was to begin with a narrow focus, concentrating on areas where there was a clear need and a public demand for action. At the time, the approach followed by the British government was to carry out a "systematic examination of discrete social problems and their solutions by way of piecemeal reforms" (Mishra, 1981:3). The merits of this approach include: social relevance, commitment to humanitarian values, and practicality. However, critics in Hong Kong contended that this need-based perspective was constrained by the belief that piecemeal social engineering is the key to social change. They argued that the social policies carried out from this perspective were executed in the absence of the articulation of social goals (Hodge, 1980). In none of the policy documents on social welfare can one find mention of any social goals that could be translated into policies and programmes. This absence of goals was matched by a similar absence of social research on social programmes (Tang, 1998).

In the last two decades of colonial rule, the government did not incorporate a gender perspective in its social welfare policies. The comment that some scholars have made about the assumptions behind British social policies is equally valid in the case of Hong Kong: "The assumptions that governments have made about female dependency have historically been simple and in accordance with the male breadwinner model: that adult married women will be dependent

on men" (Lewis, 2003:111). True, the services offered under family welfare programmes, the provision of nursery and crèche places, and family casework services have mostly assisted mothers. Services for children with special needs have helped mothers enhance their quality of life. Programmes for autistic children, resource centres for parents of children with disabilities, and respite services have also helped mothers (Hong Kong Government, 1989a, 1991a). These subsidies and provisions have basically reinforced the role of women as mothers and caregivers in families, and ignore the fact that women have individual needs and specific roles to perform in society.

The end of the 1980s saw the emergence of the feminist critique of colonial social policy. This was fully articulated in the text *Women and Welfare Policies in Hong Kong*, published by the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) (1990), a group made up of professionals, social workers, teachers, and university professors. In this book, the colonial state is depicted as upholding a residual view of welfare, thus ensuring that the provision of welfare services would be inadequate, particularly in terms of the needs of women. The contention was that, despite the phenomenal expansion in social welfare services since 1971, the colonial state failed to develop a gender perspective in social welfare and that many of its policies therefore placed a heavy toll on women. One undesirable effect of this was that the welfare system was reinforcing traditional divisions of labour in society based on gender. The welfare system was faulted, since it espoused a traditional view of the roles of men and women within the family. Limitations in social welfare services, the lack of sufficient childcare services, and the absence of a positive discrimination policy in favour of women in the colony also put them in the very difficult situation of having to shoulder all of the responsibilities in the family while reinforcing their role as carers (AAF, 1990). Furthermore, social policy tools did little to elevate women to a position of substantive equality. Feminists argued that public assistance and housing policies served only to channel resources to the family, where it frequently did not bring direct benefits to the women. They argued that it was not enough for welfare policies to be gender neutral; social policy

ought to take into account the special needs of women. The book underscored the importance of a specifically feminist social policy.

Despite this feminist critique, the colonial government stood by its policies. In fact, after the great leap of the early 1970s, it pursued an incremental social policy: it did not cut back on its social welfare services but neither did it formulate any comprehensive and rational plan to meet new social needs. The approach was characterized by small adjustments and readjustments. Social policy was continually being improved upon in response to social needs. This approach of piecemeal social engineering was grounded in the planning philosophy of disjointed incrementalism in public policy (Tang, 1998).

In the 1980s, some NGOs and women's groups took the lead in providing needed and pioneering services for women. A case in point was the Hong Kong Council of Women that campaigned for women's rights in the areas of marriage, abortion, inheritance, and sexual violence. Emphasizing women's development, the Council started the Women's Centre (Cheung, 1989), which was funded entirely by overseas church bodies. Opened in 1985, the Centre pioneered in providing various services such as information about services, networking opportunities for women, and in organizing women's forums (Cheung, 1989). Additionally, the Council established the first refuge (Harmony House) for battered women. In the face of massive demand for such a refuge, there was a perennial shortage of places in the shelter. For instance, during the year 1993-94, 100 women and 114 children were admitted. The average daily occupancy rate in the refuge was 84.7%. The number of people rejected due to a full house increased by 100%, from 66 in 1992-93 to 140 in 1993-94 (Harmony House, 1994).

In the mid-1990s, an intensified version of the need-based perspective emerged, supported in part by the buoyant economy. Besides traditional childcare and family casework services, extra resources were allocated to several newly identified needy groups — women suffering from domestic violence, single-parent families, and families with new immigrants from mainland China. Moreover, a new administrative mechanism, the Working Group on Battered Spouses, was formed in 1995, and a new refuge for battered women was set up

in 1996. Supplemental funding was allocated to single-parent families (in the form of a cash supplement for those on welfare) and there was liaison with NGOs in the planning of post-migration services for new arrivals from the mainland (Hong Kong Government, 1994b, 1995b). These groups of women were identified mainly because they were considered to be the most vulnerable, and in need of formal social services. Single parent centres and centres for new arrivals were set up by the government to cater for their special needs.

Working women have encountered many challenges. Since the 1980s, working women in the manufacturing industry in particular, have fallen victim to the structural changes that have taken place in Hong Kong's economy. Some fell into poverty when the plants in which they were working were relocated from Hong Kong to mainland China. Middle-aged women were especially vulnerable because of historical factors (their low level of education), their socially constructed role (the expectation that women should take care of the family rather than earn a living), and discrimination (both gender and age). However, these middle-aged women's needs for employment and skills training were dealt with in a remedial and ad hoc manner by the colonial government through the establishment of the Employees Retraining Board, which offered them retraining courses (Tang, 2000). In addition, the existing training programmes demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to women's needs with respect to motivation, schedule, contents, and training mode. For example, it was difficult for women who had been working in the manufacturing industry for 20 years to learn new skills such as operating computers. Meanwhile, some women reported that a lack of childcare services and age discrimination limited their ability to participate in these programmes.

Post-colonial Social Policies and Women

In the three decades prior to the 1997 transition, Hong Kong enjoyed a sustained and impressive period of economic development. The adoption of an export-led approach to economic development

that stressed industrialization produced rapid rates of growth and significant increases in per capita income. Per capita GDP in Hong Kong rose from around US$2,400 in 1965 to US$12,000 in the early 1990s. Despite the high rate of growth, social welfare development lagged behind economic development. Compared to other advanced industrialized nations, state-led social welfare services in Hong Kong have had a relatively short history of some 40 years.

Up to 1997, strong economic growth, coupled with a strong occupational and indigenous welfare system, reduced the need for comprehensive government social welfare programmes. The situation changed dramatically, however, with the onset of the Asian financial crisis in 1997. Hong Kong's economy, with a GDP per capita close to that of Japan, recorded a decline in 1998 and 1999. Its economy expanded modestly in 2000, but slipped back into recession in the latter half of 2001. In 2002, Hong Kong's fiscal deficit reached a record level. Unemployment reached 6.7% in early 2002, rose to 8.6% in mid-2003 after the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and eased back to 6.6% in late 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2006). Although there has been a modest rebound since late 2003, many more people than in the past have applied for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). The Asian financial crisis has had a serious impact on most people in Hong Kong, dogged as it has been by the intractable problems of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. Income disparities have worsened. Believing that the economy would soon achieve a quick turnaround of its own accord and that the benefits would trickle down to the less well off, the HKSAR government only intervened selectively at different times to assist specially targeted groups (such as unemployed youth, the middle class, small businessmen, and others).

It needs to be emphasized that the colonial government neither formulated coherent social policies nor created comprehensive social welfare programmes. This policy legacy was not abandoned when Tung Chee-hwa (the Chief Executive) took up the leadership of the post-colonial government. Social welfare services continued to expand incrementally. Its share of total recurrent government

spending rose from 9.4% in 1995-96 to 14.2% in 2000-01, when it stood at $30 billion (HKSAR Government, 2000b). A policy of incrementalism was the direction chosen, with government spending on various sectors of social welfare on an upward trend in the last decade of colonial rule.

The post-colonial government, however, was confronted with a continuous economic downturn, an aging society, widening income disparities, increasing unemployment, and escalating social expenditures. Tung's government paid much attention to fiscal soundness, making it clear that it aimed for a balanced budget by the year 2008 (*South China Morning Post*, 2003). A stringent policy of financial retrenchment has been adopted, with the key goals of Tung's government being a heavy emphasis on efficiency, savings, contracting out, service performance, and cutting back on public expenditures.

In a comprehensive study of social development in Hong Kong commissioned by the HKCSS in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, a gap between economic and social development was noted (Estes, 2002). The study used a total of 47 social, economic, and political indicators to empirically measure the social development of Hong Kong between 1981 and 1998. While confirming that substantial social progress had occurred in those two decades, the study also found that Hong Kong's population of low-income persons doubled between 1986 and 1998 (Estes, 2002:343). Those that had been left out of the surge in economic prosperity in Hong Kong included many children, women, elderly people, and others with serious physical and emotional disabilities. Some of the study's findings in relation to vulnerable groups were particularly distressing: the percentage of children aged 1-14 years living in low-income households increased by 75%, from 13.2% to 23.1% in the twelve years under investigation; the percentage of women living in low-income households increased by 60.6%, from 10.4% to 16.7%; and the percentage of elderly people living in low-income households increased by 50.4%, from 22.4% to 33.7% (Estes, 2002:326-28, 343).

Estes' study noted that despite some gains on the employment front, social progress for many women in Hong Kong is "far from

secure" (Estes, 2002:344), because one of their traditional sources of strength, the extended family system, is in decline. Furthermore, Estes (2002:342) highlighted the loss of family solidarity:

> The very severe decline in Hong Kong's performance on this subindex is associated with: (1) sharp decreases in the marriage rate… (2) even sharper increases in Hong Kong's divorce rate… and (3) rapidly increasing rates of *reported* family violence — including between spouses, between adults and children and, in the case of the elderly, between adult children and their aging parents.

Growing numbers of vulnerable groups and the decline in family solidarity are evidence of distorted development. Distorted development occurs when "economic development has not been accompanied by an attendant degree of social progress" (Midgley, 1995:3-4), when sections of the population are excluded from full participation in development. The impact of the Asian financial crisis on poor women has been particularly severe as household real incomes declined due to job losses. Poor women have been pressured to seek other sources of income. The cutbacks in social welfare services have further increased the pressure on women as the responsibility for nurturing (e.g., caring for the sick) still rests on them. Analysts have argued that the government must devise a means to extend the benefits of rapid economic development to all women.

Vulnerable Women

At present, several vulnerable groups are receiving attention from the government and the professionals: single parents, victims of abuse, and new arrivals to Hong Kong.

Single Parents

Women head the majority of the single-parent families in Hong Kong. From 1991 to 2001, the number of single-parent families headed by women almost tripled, from 11,210 to 33,554; while those headed by men increased only slightly, from 7,490 to 10,870. At the same time, the proportion of single-parent families headed by newly arrived migrant women increased about five times between 1991 to

2001 (from 16.9 to 77.2 out of 100,000 population aged 20 or above). The situation of being a new arrival to place adds to the needs and difficulties faced by single-parent families headed by women (HKCSS, 2005). According to a recent study, these women face a great deal discrimination, even though divorce is now more socially acceptable. Migrant women from mainland China experience the double blow of being stigmatized both as new arrivals and as divorcees (Kung, Hung and Chan, 2004). Generally, single-parent families headed by women, which have resulted from divorce or separation, have diverse needs: complex feelings on the part of the woman regarding her ability to serve as a confident and competent mother; unsatisfactory parent-child relationships; and worries about childcare and discipline (Young, 1985; Law and Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, 1991). On the other hand, impoverished female single-parent families share similar difficulties as any other family living in poverty, such as being forced to live in a crowded environment, a lack of resources for basic living, a lack of recreational facilities, and limited social interaction with others. More importantly, single-parent families headed by women fall into poverty because the dual role of caregiver and breadwinner for the family places an impossible burden on women with dependent children.

Recently, the number of CSSA cases involving single-parent families reached 39,998 at the end of April 2005, over five times the number in 1993 (Public Affairs Forum, 2005). Current policies pertaining to single women on CSSA only reinforce the negative stereotypes commonly held of them, and ought to be reviewed. Even the government is critical of its own policies, admitting that it fails to prepare such women to return to the workforce. A review report on the CSSA Scheme (Social Welfare Department, 1998) stated: "The existing policy of giving single parents the choice not to work until their youngest has reached 15 is considered excessively generous by emerging international practice which aims to get single parents back into the workforce." In May 2005, the government intended to tighten this generous policy on CSSA single parents, stipulating that single parents on CSSA with children above the age of six must go out and find work (*Ming Pao Daily News*, 2005b). This proposal

drew immediate and fierce criticism from some women's groups and social workers. They argued that unskilled women, particularly those over the age of 35, would have great difficulty finding work (*Ming Pao Daily News*, 2005a). In early July, the government revised its original proposal, asking single parents whose youngest child was aged 12 to 14 to seek at least part-time employment (eight hours a week) (HKSAR Government, 2005b).

Abused Women

The number of reported cases of domestic violence has increased rapidly, reaching over 3,000 in 2003. After child abuse cases, women again topped the list of victims in spousal abuse cases. In 2002, 92% of the new cases of reported spousal violence involved wife abuse (2,787 versus 247 reported cases) (HKCSS, 2005). Among the various kinds of abuse, physical abuse dominated the reported cases (some 80%). The incidence of psychological abuse also seems to have increased recently, reaching 11% among the cases reported in 2002. Due to the socially constructed role of women and for other reasons, wife abuse has occurred more frequently than is acknowledged by official statistics (Tang, 1994, 1999). According to a study carried out in 1999 based on a randomly selected community-wide sample, about 65% of women had experienced verbal abuse while about 10% had experienced physical abuse (Tang, 1999).

Many difficulties are encountered by abused women. In line with their socially constructed role, women often tend to be submissive to their husbands. This factor, and the personality characteristics of men, are identified as the factors most frequently leading to wife abuse. The experience of being abused physically or psychologically is usually related to women's feelings of fear and guilt and the erosion of their confidence and self-esteem. Family conflicts are also associated with financial difficulties, suspected extra-marital affairs, and the burden of childcare, demonstrating that women frequently come under tremendous pressure in various aspects of life. Abused women thus often feel helpless. As women are the main caregivers in families, they are strongly impacted by episodes of spousal violence against children. The higher probability of children who have experienced

spousal violence at home suffering from emotional and behavioural problems creates great difficulties for women in childcare and parent-child relationships as well as in spousal relationships. Finally, abused women face the critical decision of whether they should remain in the marriage or seek alternative solutions. Financial sustainability, housing arrangements, low self-esteem and the related sense of lack of security, concern for children, and possible social discrimination against divorced women and single-parent families have all become major barriers for women faced with such decisions. Considering that many of the female victims of family violence did not speak about what was happening and continued living in violent families for five or even ten years, there is an urgent need for early identification and intervention so that the long-term impact of family violence on women and children can be prevented (Tang, 1997; Christian Family Service Centre and Chan, 2000).

In face of these rapidly rising new needs, the policy emphasis of the Tung government has remained unchanged. It stresses the integrity of the family and the need for family solidarity, although it must be admitted that mechanisms have been set up to deal with the immediate social problems faced by women as previously discussed. In addition, battered women could rely on the Domestic Violence Ordinance (1986), which allowed them to seek a three-month injunction against their husbands. The government also funded programmes such as family life education counselling, a hot-line service, temporary housing, legal aid, and child protective services. It also launched public education and media programmes.

New Arrivals

In recent decades, the composition of mainland Chinese immigrants in the territory has altered dramatically. Before the 1970s, the majority of those who entered Hong Kong from mainland China were illegal immigrants, most of them single men in their twenties. In recent years, however, most mainland Chinese immigrants have arrived legally. They are predominantly dependents, mainly wives and children of Hong Kong residents who have entered the territory to be reunited with their families (Table 1). For some time, workers

from Hong Kong have crossed into the mainland in search of spouses because they believe that women in mainland China demand less in financial terms than those in Hong Kong (So, 2003). Hong Kong's restrictive immigration policies have resulted in these mainland wives and children having to wait for ten years or more before they can migrate to Hong Kong.

Table 1 Distribution of Chinese legal immigrants entering Hong Kong for the purpose of family reunion[1]

Year	Number of legal immigrants[2]	Entering for family reunion			Percentage of those entering for family reunion
		Wives	Children	Husbands	
1987	27300	9559	13292	998	87.4
1988	28000	10009	13400	952	87.0
1989	27300	9565	13216	937	86.9
1990	28000	10302	13259	1042	87.9
1991	26800	10113	12513	1020	88.2
1992	28400	11128	12457	1082	86.9
1993	32900	13250	14504	1370	88.5
1994	38200	16774	17220	1423	92.7
1995	45986	18274	23033	1572	93.2
1996	61179	24780	31774	1649	95.1
1997	50287	25088	21758	1304	95.8

Notes: 1. Only figures on the total number of immigrants were available in the annual reports of 1998 through 2004, although the reports had stated that most of the immigration cases were for the purpose of family reunion. The total numbers of immigrants for the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 were 56,039, 54,625, 57,530, 53,655, 45,000, 53,500, and 38,100 respectively.

2. Numbers are rounded off to the nearest hundred.

Sources: Hong Kong Government (1988:304, 1989b:330, 1990:346, 1991b:375, 1992:366, 1993:382, 1994a:412, 1995a:445, 1996:396, 1997:397); HKSAR Government (1998:381, 1999:394, 2000a:414, 2001a:416, 2002a:433, 2003:419, 2004:434, 2005a:461).

Studies on the new arrivals have shown that the process of migration tends to lead to certain difficulties (Lou, 2000; Wong, 2001). First among these are the needs arising from settling in a new physical and psychological environment, language difficulties, and a lack of knowledge about social services in Hong Kong such as childcare, education, housing, financial support, and the labour market. Second are financial needs for emergencies or long-term support arising due to the economic disadvantages faced by such families. The 2001 Population Census showed that the median monthly domestic household income of persons from the mainland who have resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years is $12,050, significantly lower than that of the whole population in Hong Kong ($18,705) (Census and Statistics Department, 2002:9). Third is the need for social support. Research has found that the husbands of the new migrant women might not be able to provide sufficient support due to such constraints as long working hours and a lack of financial resources. Fourth, the women are often not able to claim their rights when confronted with unfriendliness and social discrimination towards new arrivals (Lai, 1997; Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association, 1998; Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres, 1999; Christian Family Service Centre, 2000; Chan, 2001; Lam and Mok, 2002; Chan, 2003). Often, when they arrive in Hong Kong, they are discriminated against and condemned as the cause of Hong Kong's social and economic problems.

Most recently, some NGOs like Caritas and the HKCSS have paid attention to the needs of the cross-border families. According to official statistics, the number of Hong Kong residents working across the border reached 237,500 in 2004 (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Most of them are middle-aged males. The massive relocation of industrial activities from Hong Kong to mainland China since the late 1970s has given rise to different sets of cross-border familial relations (So, 2003). Recently, middle-class managers and technicians from Hong Kong have taken "second wives" during their stay in southern China. With the 2003 Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), it is expected that closer Hong Kong-Mainland economic exchanges

will become more frequent in the next decade. Strengthening families to develop resilience to routine separations and identifying effective ways to assist them poses a new challenge to social services in Hong Kong (Tam, 2004; Tang, Fung and Lau, forthcoming). Currently, some NGOs offer limited specialized counselling services and educational programmes for these families. The existing services are rather remedial and reactive. Their main focus is on the problem of extra-marital relationships. Inadequate attention is given to the other issues of adjustment, as well as to the successful coping strategies already achieved by some families.

Policy Responses

In response to these needs, the interdisciplinary Working Group on Battered Spouses (replaced by the Working Group on Combating Violence in 2001) has coordinated efforts to tackle domestic violence, and knowledge and research on new immigrants has improved. The Family and Child Protective Services Unit was created in 2000 to deal with child abuse and battered spouse cases. Earlier, in 1998, a mediation service was introduced to help divorcing and separating couples resolve disputes over child custody and access.

Despite these positive steps, feminists have remained critical, arguing that these services for poor women, single parents, new arrivals, and unemployed women have reinforced the inequality and vulnerability of women in society. They note that the services for these needy groups have been placed under the programmes for family and children. Clearly, the HKSAR government still believes that women can and should be supported by their families. This family-oriented and gender-neutral approach has meant that, in the eyes of the government, women do not have rights and an identity of their own.

Although after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 Tung's efforts have focused almost exclusively on measures to revive the economy, there have been some positive developments in recent years in the area of women's rights. Prior to the transfer of sovereignty from Britain

to China, the feminist movement had already had an impact on the public policy arena in Hong Kong. After the Second World War, while most Hong Kong people were concerned about basic needs such as food and shelter, the Hong Kong Council of Women started raising consciousness about the status of women by campaigning for the abolition of the legally sanctioned system of polygamy (Lai, Au and Cheung, 1997). Consisting mainly of expatriate women and Chinese women who had studied abroad, the group was formed in 1947 to campaign for rights in areas such as marriage, abortion, inheritance, and sexual violence. Soon afterwards, the Family Planning Association was revived in 1950 to provide family planning, education, clinics, and other services. With family planning, women gained a degree of control over reproduction (Cheung, 1989; Wu, 2001). After a protracted struggle with women's groups, the colonial government finally decided to ratify on behalf of the colony the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Women's groups firmly believed that the adoption of this Convention would have a positive impact on the condition of women in society. Parallel to this development, women's groups fought for the establishment of an institutional mechanism within the government for the advancement of women. Such a machinery would help to ensure that the government would honour its responsibility for implementing international obligations and its own commitment to promote the status of women (Cheung and Chung, 2006). Seen in this light, the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996 represented another landmark development in women's rights. It could be regarded as a partial response to the 1995 Platform for Action as endorsed by the United Nations (1995). Since its inception, the Commission has been championing women's rights. It assists abused women in their pursuit of justice, taking the perpetrator to court for damages (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005).

In 2000, following pressure from the United Nations and feminist groups, and the increasing attention being paid to the conditions in which women live, promoting the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong became a significant goal mentioned in the HKSAR government's policy address. In January 2001, the Women's

Commission was set up. This was a milestone in the government's efforts to coordinate policy advocacy, multi-sector efforts, and the provision of services for the advancement of women in Hong Kong. In the same year, the goal to "incorporate women's perspectives in the process of policy making" was added, which could be regarded as a "belated" response to the United Nations CEDAW Committee's Concluding Comments on the government's initial report under the Convention. It could also be seen as a step towards fulfilling the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (HKSAR Government, 2000c, 2001b, 2002b). Since its establishment, the Women's Commission has identified three priority areas of action, namely, public education, gender mainstreaming, and empowerment of women. The Commission has organized various activities in these areas, including launching a publicity campaign; drafting the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist for policy makers, arranging forums, conferences and training courses; drafting a collaborative framework with NGOs, women's groups, and others interested in working on women's issues in Hong Kong; and launching a Capacity Building Mileage Programme to develop the potential of women.

While the HKSAR government has recognized that gender inequality and imbalances of power exist in Hong Kong, and while it has had the intention to bring about equal opportunities for women in policy making and service assessment, the HKSAR government has failed to ensure that the rights of women are enforced in all policies and services. A case in point can be seen in the Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC). In 2003, the HKSAR government started this new service delivery model to integrate family welfare services and community-based services. This restructuring effort was based on an evaluation report conducted by a local university (University of Hong Kong, 2001). This family service review report argued that the existing eight family service programmes (Family Services Centres, Senior Social Work Practitioners, Family Life Education Resource Centre, Family Activity and Resource Centres, Family Aide Service, Family Care Demonstration and Resource Centre cum Carers' Support Centre, Family Education, and support services for the family such as Post-migration Centres and Single Parent Centres) vary in their

operations and in the services they provide, often overlapping and operating in a reactive, remedial, and casework-dominated fashion. They did not proactively plan for emerging family issues, nor have they tended to show sensitivity towards hard-to-reach families with real needs.

A new IFSC model was proposed with the aim of promoting accessibility to users with as few physical, psychological, and administrative barriers as possible. The model stresses the early identification of needs and intervention before problems deteriorate further; a deeper integration of services cutting across programme boundaries; and partnership between service providers to achieve efficient and effective use of scarce resources. Adopting a "child-centred, family-focused and community-based" approach, it is designed to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive, and remedial services that meet the needs of families in a holistic and cost-effective manner. Structurally, the IFSCs are to be formed by transforming conventional Family Services Centres or by merging these centres with community-based units. Each centre is to have three main units (a family counselling unit, a family support unit, and a family resource unit), stressing the development of the preventive and developmental functions of social work practice. Hence, family needs will be proactively identified and interventions will be carried out by a multi-skilled team, in a framework in which case referrals and case management can be easily implemented.

Fifteen pilot projects have been evaluated to determine whether this new model will work in meeting the needs of families in the community, whether it is capable of setting a benchmark level for future IFSC development, and whether it can achieve the goal of cost-effectiveness. The HKSAR government seems committed to this new model. In April 2004, the Social Welfare Department proposed a four-phase development plan, in which the aim is to establish 61 IFSCs by the first quarter of 2005, covering all geographical areas of Hong Kong. Each IFSC, which will serve a population of 100,000 to 150,000, is to be staffed by a minimum of 13-15 social workers, broken down into one supervisor, four to six counsellors in a family counselling unit, six group workers and brief counsellors in a family

support unit, and two community and group workers in a family resource unit.

Despite the government's optimism, critics have voiced concerns about this new model. Many contend that it would fail unless the government provides adequate resources. Others are sceptical about its effectiveness, insisting that the formation of the IFSC should be separated from the issue of efficiency and savings (HKCSS, 2003; University of Hong Kong, 2003). Critics further question whether this model is a cure-all, as some gaps in the provision of services are inevitable. Importantly, as the IFSC took off, the HKSAR government decided to shut down five specialized centres in 2004, contending that their main functions could now be subsumed under the IFSC framework. These centres were set up three years ago to help single parents overcome their difficulties, develop supportive and self-help networks, and to become more self-reliant. Each specialized centre received HK$1.56 million a year and handled 1,200 cases. Critics argue that it would be naive to assume that services for single parents, originally provided by these specialized centres, can now be provided by the newly formed IFSCs (Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, 2000; Lam and Mok, 2002).

Despite the adoption of an integrative model, a gender-sensitive perspective has generally been absent in the planning and implementation of the IFSCs. For some time, the Social Welfare Department, NGOs, and the HKCSS have met regularly in the Task Group on Implementation of Integrated Family Service Centres to discuss and work out a common Funding and Service Agreement, service polices, and common practice guidelines. Notably, the guiding principle for the IFSC is to promote the welfare and interests of clients, rather than the welfare of women. Thus, it is not to be expected that the IFSC will respond to the specific needs of women. In all likelihood, the IFSC will reinforce the traditional construction of women in terms of their family roles.

The above discussion rests on the understanding that traditional family welfare services direct resources in such a way as to reinforce family unity and to preserve family harmony. Women's needs and rights are being sacrificed for the sake of family unity. This family-

oriented ideology not only influences family and child services but also workfare and unemployment-support services. Except for maternity welfare, all working conditions and benefits regarding leave and constraints on overtime work in Hong Kong are not gender-sensitive.

There is mounting evidence that women's rights are not fully respected in the territory. First, working women receive less pay than men for the same job. Five years after the enactment of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, the pay discrepancies between male and female are 29% on average and particularly in the plant and machine operators and assemblers and elementary occupations (Census and Statistics Department, 2001:53). Second, an increasing number of women have fallen into poverty. About half of all low-income earners are middle-aged women. Some 70% of employees whose monthly income is below US$350 are women (Wong and Lee, 2000; Census and Statistics Department, 2001:50). Third, the indirect contributions of women to the labour market have not been recognized and reflected in current policy and services, including their provision of voluntary services, their services in caring for the family and the community, and their dual responsibilities in cases where they are career women.

With regard to retirement protection, women remain at risk of falling to poverty despite the introduction of the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) in December 2000. Studies carried out in the West have highlighted the fact that formal social security systems often target male workers and put women at a disadvantage. The MPF is principally employment-related and contributory (with contributions coming from employees and employers), and therefore benefit those who have a long work record. Thus, the MPF excludes half of the population of women (homemakers and part-timers) from its protection as well as lower income groups, represented disproportionately by women in the case of Hong Kong. Twenty to 30 years from now, when Hong Kong's aging population will comprise about one-fourth of the total population, this will be one of the key issues that society will need to face (Census and Statistics Department, 2004). A possible scenario is that, by that time, while the majority of the male population will be over 60 years old and will be partially supported by their contributions

to the MPF, a far smaller proportion of the female older population will receive this kind of support due to the different life-cycle of elderly women (Cheung, 2002). Such a worry is empirically grounded. Based on a telephone survey of 1,078 respondents, Lee (2003) examined the retirement planning activities of middle-aged adults and found that men are more likely to be involved in financial planning. Women are more likely to take part in planning for health, living arrangements, and psychological well-being. Because they live longer and because they have often not planned financially for retirement, they are prime candidates to fall into poverty.

Policy Advocacy: NGOs and Women's Groups

The NGOs in the territory who deliver services to women in need are mainly subsidized by the government and work within the need paradigm. However, in response to the colonial government's lack of a gender perspective in policy-making, the HKCSS, an association of NGOs, took the lead in collecting information about women's services and needs. In 1984, they promoted a women-centred approach by setting up a Working Group on Women's Services under the Community Development Division. This working group conducted a number of surveys on service needs and delivery for women in 1985, 1990, and 1996, which provided a profile of the women's services run by NGOs (HKCSS, 1990, 1996, 1997). As discussed above, both the Women's Centre and Harmony House, opened in 1985, became a positive force in mobilizing and supporting the HKCSS in the direction of advocating a women-centred approach for the government. The HKCSS also fostered networking among women's organizations, promoting a women-centred approach in the provision of services, and advocating the establishment of the Women's Commission.

According to the HKCSS's report, in the mid-1980s women's services were provided by various NGOs and projects such as the Neighbourhood Level Community Development Project, Community Centres, Child and Youth Centres, Family Life Education, and other projects that were not supported by government funding. These were considered part of social welfare services, regardless of the fact that women, who were the major target group, were also the major resource

upon which service units drew to promote their services and recruit members. However, given the lack of a gender perspective in social welfare policy, the diverse nature of the NGOs made it impossible for them to reach a consensus on the purpose of providing services for women. In view of this, in the early 1990s the HKCSS reiterated a women-centred approach to the provision of services, which stressed gender-sensitivity, individual rights, and the personal development of women (HKCSS, 1990).

Years of advocacy by the HKCSS and women's groups have led to some changes. Besides traditional services promoting family relationships, parenting skills, the utilization of leisure time, recreational activities, and community participation, new services gradually emerged that stressed such things as self-understanding, and identifying personal needs and potential areas for development (HKCSS, 1996). After NGOs started to introduce new programmes for women, feminist ideas of empowerment were quickly taken up in some centres. For instance, Kwok (1995) documented the setting up in a family service centre of an empowerment networking group for women dealing with problems associated with extramarital affairs, which was inspired by feminist thinking. Through the collective sharing of their experiences and the causes of their emotional problems, women gave expression to their own difficulties and concerns. Unfortunately, notwithstanding these occasional developments, it has been found that services focusing on family relationships and parenting skills are perceived to be more popular than services aimed at promoting gender equality (HKCSS, 1996).

Regrettably, according to a later report, the traditional ideology in which women are perceived as caregivers and wives has not changed much. It is still dominant in the delivery of services (HKCSS, 2005). The HKCSS's failure to promote the women-centred approach among various service providers needs to be highlighted. Among the reasons for the underdevelopment of women-centred services are: women have no time to avail themselves of the services due to work or household duties; a lack of resources; and a lack of experienced social workers (HKCSS, 1997). A further reason is that the Working Group on Women's Services itself did not take a strong stance on

influencing service agencies. The disbandment of the Working Group in 2001 showed how little headway this kind of advocacy had made.

Currently, social workers in the voluntary sector continue to engage in a number of areas of services for women: individual development and growth, education, health, employment, human rights, and crises. NGOs have always played a significant role as policy advocates as well as service providers for women. They are regarded as partners of the government. Being strongly influenced by the dominant family ideology, most of the social services provided by the NGOs such as integrated family services, services for battered women, services for single parents, and family support services have not been purposefully designed to take into account the perspectives of women, even though the majority of the service recipients at family and child service centres are women and their children.

Nevertheless, some NGOs could serve as vehicles for progressive social change. In the present context of economic globalization and free trade, efforts to fight unemployment among women are focused at the community level. In times of adversity, social workers have had a unique opportunity to develop innovative approaches to meet women's needs. Some of them have advocated community development as a strategy to help communities become more stable and achieve greater control over their resources. In the past decade, various NGOs used the "Community Economic Development" (CED) strategy to help unemployed and underemployed women gain better access to jobs that pay a living wage and achieve individual empowerment. These activities include the launching of a housecleaning cooperative that takes its workers from the ranks of unemployed women. According to the Development Leadership Network, CED is a process by which a community organizes economic activities in ways that benefit the community as a whole, aiming to achieve community and personal empowerment through strategies that encourage cooperation and interdependence and that seek to equalize resources among its rich and poor populations (Shragge, 1994).

In addition to the NGOs, various women's groups have emerged to promote women's rights and empowerment. As noted above, the Hong Kong Council of Women pioneered the first community-based

Women's Centre and popularized the community approach to the development of women. At the same time, it took into consideration indigenous characteristics of Chinese women, while enhancing the empowerment of women. The Centre shied away from the radical feminist approach that promoted "power to women through a battle between two sexes" (Cheung, 1989:104). In sum, the Centre successfully promoted women's rights through enhancing the competence of women, and elevated the status of Chinese women in society.

On the other hand, the setting up of the AAF and the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres can be regarded as an important outcome of the feminist critique of social welfare in Hong Kong. Since the mid-1980s, the AAF has engaged in policy advocacy to achieve gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination, promote the participation of women in politics and in formulating public policies, and to pursue equality. To achieve these ends, it undertook various activities: monitoring the government's policy-making process; providing backup resources for women's groups; raising the consciousness of women; conducting studies on women; and providing legal consultations for needy women. Several books and reports published by the AAF have become major sources of reference for people interested in the relationship between social welfare and feminism (AAF, 1990, 2001, 2003).

From the late 1980s onwards, the development of women's associations has been marked by a unity arising from shared concerns. First, there was the development of geographically located women's associations in new towns such as Tin Shui Wai, which were populated by newly arrived immigrant women and single parents. A family tragedy in Tin Shui Wai in April 2004, in which three members (a mother and two young children) of a family receiving CSSA were killed by the husband, triggered protests from these organizations about the lack of resources for needy women and the inadequacies of current social services. The murdered mother was a new arrival from the mainland who had sought help from social workers, a women's shelter, and the police immediately before the tragedy (Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai, 2004). Believing this tragedy

could have been averted, these organizations were critical of the underlying assumption of "family integrity" adopted by social workers and policemen, and of the insufficient resources being devoted to women's services. Some groups argued that the government should treat domestic violence as a criminal offence.

Another trend was the development of women's associations focusing on specific issues confronting needy women, such as the Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women and Action for REACH OUT (showing concern for sex workers), and professional associations such as the Hong Kong Women Professionals and Entrepreneurs Association. These associations provide various kinds of assistance and services for women and their family members. The work of women's organizations has certainly improved the general welfare of women in Hong Kong. At the same time, there has been a significant development in the emergence of women's groups such as the AAF that are devoted to eliminating gender discrimination and raising the consciousness of women.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argue that two potent forces have emerged as important determinants of the services that are being made available to women in Hong Kong: the need paradigm adopted by the colonial and post-colonial governments and the feminist critique. The feminist perspective is important as it furnishes society with a perceptive critique of the current situation. There are still comparatively few feminists and their influence remains circumscribed in the area of social welfare. Hence, their impact on policy development is not strong. Advocating women's rights and challenging the traditional ideology of the family is still an uphill task (Tam and Yeung, 1994; AAF, 2003). After years of advocacy, the lack of a feminist social policy and the prevalence of a need-based perspective testify to the fact that the feminist perspective has not had a major influence.

Admittedly, the need paradigm adopted by the government has made some contributions in promoting the well-being of women and

in meeting some of their immediate needs. However, many women, such as battered wives, new arrivals, and middle-aged unemployed women, continue to face special barriers to enhancing their well-being because their gender-specific needs have been neglected. Thus, the problems linger. Such women still suffer from social isolation and marginalization. Newly arrived immigrant women are not allowed access to CSSA on their own; women in a family cannot apply for social security assistance as individuals; unemployed middle-aged women are marginalized by social discrimination; and victims of family violence are vulnerable due to a lack of access to help and to outreach services for the prevention of family tragedies.

Hong Kong has a long history of a gender-neutral social policies geared to supporting family solidarity. Even after the establishment of the Women's Commission, Gender Mainstreaming Checklists have not been established at various levels of policy-making and service provision. There is an implicit assumption that such a policy is based on the fundamental formal equality of individuals in the community and that women's needs can be fulfilled within the "family integrity" (i.e., the "family as a unit") framework (Chan, 2003). In sum, the HKSAR government treats women's work as welfare work that is meant to maintain social stability. However, the above discussion indicates that women are treated unequally and that women's rights are made subservient to the needs of the family. This observation is consistent with the analysis of the development of social policy in advanced western countries where women are still being treated unfairly after the introduction of social policies that adopt a gender-free approach (Brown, 1984; International Labour Organization, 1984). Such an approach would only address women's needs and concerns to the extent to which they conform to male norms (Bakker, 1998). By contrast, a gender-sensitive approach would promote gender awareness among social policy makers and practitioners so that the needs and interests of women are addressed in the planning and implementation process. Overseas, feminist analyses have emphasized the complex relationship between welfare systems and women, and the significance of gender in analysing social policies (Kuo, 1998; Lewis, 2003). Locally, feminist organizations like the

AAF (2003) are advocating some necessary changes to the study of women's welfare. These include the collecting of comprehensive data on women; continuous studies of the needs and problems of women; heightened sensitivity to existing policies that might promote a particular sexual division of labour; and more communication among social workers that serve needy women.

Globally, feminist analyses are criticizing traditional assumptions about the dependence of women on men and the neglect of women's contributions to welfare (both formal and informal) (Lewis, 2003). Women act as unpaid providers of welfare when they withdraw from the labour force in order to care for children or dependent adults. Feminists are further arguing that economic security for women and women's rights mean more than helping women find jobs. It means improving the power relations in a woman's home, in her community, and in the market so that she can take advantage of growing international markets (UNIFEM, 2005). Similar criticisms of the welfare system have been made in Hong Kong. If the HKSAR government is to fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), strong commitment is needed. Paragraph 292 of the Platform states: "To ensure effective implementation of the Platform for Action and to enhance the work for the advancement of women at the national, subregional/regional and international levels, Governments, the United Nations system and all other relevant organizations should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective, inter alia, in the monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes." The post-colonial government ought to take a strong lead by establishing mechanisms at various levels so as to bring about the adequate mobilization of existing resources as well as to allocate additional resources to address these issues. Considering that the goals of the empowering women in Hong Kong and promoting their well-being were set more than a decade ago, progress on this front has been very slow, and a considerable number of barriers remain to be overcome.

Up until now, the key stakeholders, such as clients and social work professionals, have not been satisfied with the ways in which the government has responded. This is not to deny that both the colonial and the HKSAR governments have expended a considerable amount

of resources on caring for families and children and created many new programmes. In most cases, however, these services have evolved incrementally and in an ad hoc manner; they have been rather limited in coverage and provision has been inadequate and poorly coordinated (Tang and Midgley, 2002). There is also a serious lack of policy vision, and a corresponding dearth of policy statements, in the key areas of social services (e.g., the poor and immigrants). Above all, the "social welfare reforms" introduced in the past few years by the government have led to a redefinition of the working relationship between the government and the NGOs, while at the same time resulting in the capping of the government's financial commitments (Tang, Fung and Lau, forthcoming). In particular, the post-colonial government has been hamstrung by a number of factors in its delivery of social care: a continuous economic downturn, rising budget deficits, the policy legacy and impact of the New Managerialism. As a consequence, the HKSAR government is not in a position to pioneer new directions in social services. This means that the call to address the needs and rights of women remains something of a voice in the wilderness. There is still a long way to go before the government, NGOs, and women's groups can work together for a sustainable and just Hong Kong society, a society in which women and men can equally enjoy the opportunities arising from society's achievements.

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Social Welfare and Women

The Dominant Approach and the Feminist Critique

Abstract

This paper discussed the development of social welfare policies and services for women in Hong Kong. Two dominant stands were identified: the need paradigm and the feminist critique. The plight of vulnerable groups of women such as single parents, victims of abuse, and new arrivals were discussed to illustrate how policy responses were developed and seen under the need paradigm and the feminist critique. It is concluded that the need paradigm adopted by the government has made some contributions to promoting the well-being of women and to meeting some of their immediate needs. However, there are still groups of women that continue to face special barriers to enhancing their well-being. There is still a long way to go before the government, NGOs, and women's groups can work together for a sustainable and just Hong Kong society.

婦女和社會福利
主流觀點和女性主義的批判

鄧廣良
樓瑋群

（中文摘要）

本文探討香港婦女社會福利的發展，指出婦女福利政策的發展背後主要受兩大思潮的影響，一個是以需要為本的社會政策視角，另一個是女性主義的批判。本文繼而運用這兩種視角討論弱勢婦女群體，例如單親母親、受虐婦女和新來港婦女的情況。總體來說，以需要為本的政策在一定意義上回應了婦女的即時之需，並促進了婦女的福祉，但是也無形中阻礙了某些婦女群體對福祉的追求。要在香港建立一個可持續發展和公義的社會，還需要政府、非政府組織和婦女團體長期的共同努力。

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