

Family at-Risks: the risks and its management in Hong Kong

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Abstract Family is being considered as the most fundamental unit of the Chinese society in Hong Kong by the society and the government. Family has been expected to play the role of providing care and support to its members; serving as a significant partner in the overall welfare arrangement. Members in that social unit are perceived as having the moral obligation to others. Nevertheless, the family system has been challenged by various social forces. Data have been collected to prove the system is declining, but not disappearing – in structural and values dimensions; and support the argument that family is at-risk.

As informed by the notions of 'risk' and 'individualization', family structure and its values have become more and more uncertain, flexible and de-traditionalized. Government and individuals realize the risks and already adopting strategy to manage these. This paper uses the risk concept to evaluate the risks that facing the Hong Kong's families, the current strategies and the underlying ideologies adopted.

The paper argues, facing 'individualization' and 'post-familial families' constituted by elected relationship which is unstable and risky by its nature, the intervention requires a realistic understanding of the boundary of state's intervention in terms of regulating personal relationships in the age of reflexive modernity. The paper advocates for a cautious but not conservative approach in intervening into family.

Family at Risks – Risk and Individualization

Though there is a common consensus that current family are facing challenges and even disintegrating or disorganizing, there is also a counter-argument that mainstream and conventional family structure and norms are still remain intact (e.g. Berger, 2002). A third alternative is similar to what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that family has been transformed to a 'post-familial families' – new forms of family reflecting a wide variety of combinations.

Risk society, in Beck's construction, refers to a specific set of transformed social, economic, political and cultural conditions that are confronted by the ideas of manufactured uncertainty towards a more complex, contingent and fragmented format (1992; Giddens, 2000). Risk society is a product of the continuing industrial modernization – a move from industrial society (first modernity) to post-industrial society (second or reflexive modernity). Human

being attempts to manage the risks may help to alleviate the situation, but also create new risky conditions. The foundation of this reflexive modernity is the inescapable 'self-confrontation' that accompanies the contemporary industrial way of life (Beck, 1994:5).

Individuals will experience or compel to experience 'individualization' - a process of lost of certainty, disintegration and reintegration of persons in the society, through the dismantlement and establishment of new systems and values. As defined by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim,

Individualization means that men and women are released from the gender roles prescribed by industrial society for life in the nuclear family. At the same time, and this aggravates the situation, they find themselves forced, under pain of material disadvantage, to build up a life of their own by way of the labour market, training and mobility, and if need be to pursue this life at the cost of their commitments to family, relations and friends (1995: 6).

People's life gradually departed from previous rather standard mode, becoming more open and contingent to individual decisions. As suggested by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim,

Individualization is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labor market, the education system, the welfare state and so on (2002: 4).

It ends up in the 'de-standardization' of life course (in which life-course is subjected to ever-changing demands from factors such as self planning, labor, education, mobility, etc.), 'de-traditionalization' of family and 'desegregation' of family functions from the family (in which marriage can be de-linked from sex and parenting, parenting can be multiplied by divorce or added / deleted by cohabitation or separation) (Beck, 1992, 2002). In the past, marriage is the way to pool resources for risk coping, whereas in contemporary society, marriage is a risk in itself (Lewis, 2005).

Individuals will have to take up more responsibility for planning their lives and managing risks. Marriage has become a chosen construct and product of the individuals who form it. Marriage is lived at one's personal risk, with the adventurous search of the many of a 'life of their own'. The normal biography has become the 'elective biography', the 'reflexive biography', the 'do-it-yourself biography', and this always incur a 'risk biography', (Beck &

Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 3, 42).

Family is becoming more of an 'elective relationship' as compared to the 'community of need' in the past (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998). Rather than seeking firm guidance from outside, they have to make the decision by themselves. More and more things happen in the relationships and families must be negotiated. Thus, a harmonious everyday life is an achievement based on a great deal of preparation, which requires the family coordinator to be a skillful juggler, and family is being perceived as a daily balancing act or a permanent 'do-it-yourself project' (Beck, 1992; Lewis, 2005). As described by Beck-Gernsheim,

The general diagnosis is that people's lives are becoming more mobile, more porous, and of course more fragile'. There is the 'until the next thing' principle appearing, as Bauman calls it, characterized by a kind of refusal of lifelong plans, permanent ties, and immutable identities (2002: 41).

Family is 'an association of individual persons, who each bring to it their own interests, experiences and plans, and who are each subjected to different controls, risks and constraints' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998: 67). Life in this condition requires a highly sophisticated act to negotiate the demands and mediate the conflicts (intra and inter-generation); and to hold family members' biographies together.

Nevertheless, 'while adult men and women are increasingly pulled apart by processes of individualization, so also, paradoxically, they are likely to intensify the search for an intimate relationship: as traditions become debated, the attractions of a close relationship grow' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 32). Family is not disappearing, but diverse relationships and structures are there to replace the conventional family mode. 'The black-and-white alternative "end of the family" or "family as the future" is not appropriate. The focus should instead be on the many grey areas or, better, the many different shades in the niches inside and outside the traditional family network (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 85).'

Conventional family model is declining as new forms of living appear and spread – forms which (at least generally) aim not at living alone but at relationships of a different kind. For example, family without a formal marriage or without children; single parenting, conjugal succession, or same-sex partnerships; part-time relationships and companionships lasting for some period in life; living between more than one home or between different towns. These represent what they call the contours of the 'post-familial family' (*ibid*).

Individualization, certainly, does not equal to 'an unfettered logic of action, juggling in a

virtually empty space'; (*ibid*: 2) nor 'a limitless acting out of personal desires, nor mere "subjectivity"' (*ibid*: 43). Individualization also does not by any means imply that the increased freedom of choice is the same thing as a complete breakdown of existing order that, indeed, individuals are still confronted by the structure. It is 'not just as a growth in options and freedoms, but more as a way of life under certain institutional constraints and demands or, indeed, as pressure to put a life together under often contradictory and partly incompatible conditions' (*ibid*: 126). Individualization should be seen as a 'trend' which does not cover whole population without differentiation.

People are still linked with all major social institutions, for example, labor market, welfare state, the state, educational and legal systems, which are still dominant in modern society. These institutions have produced and continue to produce regulations (demands, instructions and entitlements) that will have impacts on individuals and families. The family is particularly under the pressure from work. Beck argues that the market society is assuming a 'no family and no marriage' society, that in this form of society, everyone is independent and survive on their own, and has to ready to adapt and sacrifice for the demands from their work. The end result will be only those who fulfill these requirements can survive – mostly family with no partner and no child or those who can maintain mobility, whereas those who have been disabled by their commitments to partners, families and marriages will suffer (1992: 191).

The family is also facing with more and more 'intrusion' from the public sector through legislation and welfare state arrangements. In many aspects, these intervention seek to advocate and constitute (or reconstitute) the nature of family, the modes of family life, the roles of its members, and family life planning. Social services such as premarital therapy, premarital checklist and marriage preparation sessions, all aim to better prepare the person to enter into this relationship. Family planning and parent education are promoted to minimize the occurrence of risk or to mitigate the risk when it happen. This 'private' domain is no longer private and subjected to many forms of political intervention -- family has been politicized (Beck, 1992: 179). Yet, theorists argue that these practices may give rise to a trap, as prevention does to a prevention trap (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 63). 'The more we try to colonize the future, the more likely it is to spring surprises upon us (Giddens, 1994: 58)'.

The family is also facing with the challenges from the feminist movement. Resulted from improving education, economic status, new self-awareness and hence greater power, and requests for an alternative life-course, women are now seeking to plan 'a life of one's own', if not being forced into 'a life of one's own' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The dual-earner family model (or maybe in reality, 'one-and-a-half earner' model) is more popular, though

still not replacing the male-only breadwinner model.¹

In summary, transformation from industrial (first modernity) to post-industrial (reflexive modernity) engenders the trend of individualization, which challenge the stability of family. In turn, new forms of family echo and reinforce the trend of individualization, and impact on the overall structures, institutions and values. A triadic relationship between these three: socio-economic transformation; family restructuring; and individualization as the major forces pushing the changes in this triad, explaining the sources of family risks.

Hong Kong Family at-Risk

There is no research linking the notion of individualization with family changes in Hong Kong. However, we can use the existing indicators to illustrate the changing families and the trend of individualization. The most-frequently cited indicators are those related to family break-down, lost of its intimacy and its treasured values. With these in mind, it is commonly accepted that Hong Kong's family is at-risk.

Classical study by Wong in 1970s argued that functional specialization and increasing mobility in the industrialized society have led to a lost of family functions and isolation from their kinship and social networks (1975).² Average family size has been reduced from 4.5 in 1971 to 3.0 in 2006 mainly as a result of reduction in number of children per family, and increase in the elderly population living alone or in residential institutions.

Table 1: Household Number and Size

| Family Profile | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total number of domestic households | 1,582,215 | 1,855,553 | 2,053,412 | 2,313,800 |
| Average household size | 3.4 | 3.3 | 3.1 | 3.0 |
| Proportion of one unextended nuclear family households | 61.6% | 63.6% | 66.2% | 67.0% |

Source: Committee on Strategic Development, 2006

Although the so called unextended nuclear family is still a predominantly format of living arrangement, we also witness a growth of alternative forms of arrangements. Single-parent family has been steadily increased in the past decades from 41,200 in 1996 to 78,800 in

¹ Nevertheless, they observed that in the post-familial families, women are still swinging between 'life for their own' and 'life for others'; where as the men did not make corresponding changes, and these might intensify more family conflicts, or even violence (Beck, 1992).

² Although Wong's notion of nuclearization of family is challenged by empirical evidence, and notions of family model (such as Lee's 'modified extended family, see 1987), it is valid to argue that smaller size nuclear family is a dominant form of family in here (see Table 1).

mid-2006, mainly due to more divorce.³ The crude divorce rate increased rapidly from 0.4 per 1,000 population in 1981 to 2.00 in 2001. Number of divorce decree granted has dramatically increased for more than 7 times from 1981 to 2006 (Table 2). There is increasing number of population who are divorced and separated in the society, and never married population (from 1,430,467 in 1981 to 1,920,522 in 2006) (Table 3).

The increase among the never-married female is more phenomenal, especially since mid-1990s, possibly reflect a trend of changing life preferences, values and choices among the female. Statistics show that among the never married females, they had higher level of educational attainment than their male counterparts.⁴ That may reflect for those better-educated female (as well as male), they are having a different values and awareness, and hence life course planning compared with the older generations, which possibly reflect the trend of individualization.⁵ The choice of late marriage (or non-marriage) and having fewer (or no) children also show how female (and possibly male too) perceive marriage as an arrangement at their life-stages.

Table 2: Divorce Statistics, 1981-2001

| Year | Divorce petitions filed | Divorce decrees granted | Crude divorce rate (based on divorce decree granted) per 1,000 population |
|------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1981 | 2,811 | 2,060 | 0.40 |
| 1986 | 5,339 | 4,257 | 0.77 |
| 1991 | 7,287 | 6,295 | 1.11 |
| 1996 | 12,834 | 9,473 | 1.48 |
| 2001 | 13,737 | 13,425 | 2.00 |
| 2003 | 15,915 | 13,829 | -- |
| 2004 | 14,233 | 15,604 | -- |
| 2005 | 14,956 | 14,873 | -- |
| 2006 | 16,410 | 15,667 | -- |

Sources: Census & Statistics Dept, 2002; 2006 Annual Statistics of Statistics
Judiciary, HKSAR Government

Table 3: Population aged 15 and above by sex and marital status

| Marital status | 1981 | 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Male | | | | | | |
| Never married | 848,037 | 843,697 | 807,443 | 858,341 | 918,722 | 956,281 (34.3%) |
| Divorced (D) / separated (S) (% of total by sex) | 12,418 | 21,089 | 23,871 | 40,964 (1.6%) | 57,483 (2.1%) | D: 63,877 (2.3%) S: 13,286 (0.5%) |
| Female | | | | | | |

³ Also noted that single-parent family is more vulnerable to poverty. The LFPR of single parents decreased from 72.2% in 1996 to 63.7% in 2001. The number of economically inactive single parents increased from 11,800 persons in 1996 to 21,200 persons in 2001. Their unemployment rate stood at 9.0% in 2005.

⁴ The proportions of never married females aged 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49 having attended tertiary education in 2001 were 38.8%, 32.9% and 22.8% respectively, as compared with the corresponding proportions of 34.2%, 28.2% and 16.6% for their male counterparts.

⁵ For example, on family values and filial piety, see Kwan *et al*, 2003 & Lam, R C, 2006.

| | | | | | | |
|--|---------|---------|---------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Never married | 582,430 | 616,955 | 626,554 | 737,926 | 868,797 | 964,241 (30.7%) |
| Divorced (D) / separated (S) (% of total by sex) | 11,843 | 21,588 | 29,614 | 56,298 (2.2%) | 94,866 (3.3%) | D: 125,686 (4.0%) S: 21,436 (0.7%) |

Source: Census & Statistics Dept, 2002; 2007

At the same time, the number of remarriage steadily increases meaning there are more and more repartnered couples and families in the society. Lam's study has revealed the risks that the stepchildren have to face with in reconstituted families (2006).

Table 4: Number of Marriage by Types of Marriage, 1981-2001

| Year | First marriage of both partners | First marriage of one party and remarriage of other party | Remarriage of both parties | Others | Total |
|------|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--------|--------|
| 1981 | 41,190 | 1,891 | 305 | 7,370 | 50,756 |
| 1986 | 34,088 | 2,781 | 552 | 5,859 | 43,280 |
| 1991 | 34,522 | 3,981 | 911 | 3,154 | 42,568 |
| 1996 | 29,397 | 4,689 | 1,207 | 1,752 | 37,045 |
| 2001 | 25,285 | 5,416 | 1,857 | 267 | 32,925 |
| 2002 | 23,515 | 8,354 | | 201 | 32,070 |
| 2003 | 25,836 | 6,822 | 2,652 | 129 | 35,439 |
| 2004 | 29,306 | 8,440 | 3,482 | 148 | 41,376 |
| 2005 | -- | -- | -- | -- | 43,018 |
| 2006 | -- | -- | -- | -- | 50,328 |

Others: Figures refer to re-registration of couples who had customarily married in Hong Kong before the Marriage Reform Ordinance enacted in October 1971 or married outside Hong Kong.

Sources: Census & Statistics Dept, *Monthly Digest of Statistics (August 2003)*; 2005

The number of marriage decreased steadily but reverted since 2003 largely due to the sudden increase of cross-border (i.e., Mainland) marriage, resulted from the close socio-economic interaction between Hong Kong and the Mainland (Table 5). For example, in 2004, 36.3% of the total marriage registered in Hong Kong involving either one party from Mainland. Such increasing number of cross-border marriage has created a unique type of 'split family' with their risks (Kung et al, 2004; Tam, 2004). There is mass migration of their family members from Mainland to Hong Kong since 1990s for family reunion - a total of 525,234 Mainlanders have arrived Hong Kong between 1996 and 2005. This type of marriage also created a multicultural family, a creation of an intercultural lifeworld, which add the difficulties in fitting together and hence more conflicts, apart from more vulnerable to poverty.

Table 5: Successful Applicants of Certificate of Absence of Marriage Record (CAMR) for the purpose of marrying in the Mainland of China and the number of marriages registered in Hong Kong with bridegrooms / brides from the Mainland

| Year | - Male - Brides from the Mainland China | | | - Female - Bridegrooms from the Mainland China | | |
|------|--|----------------------------|--------|---|----------------------------|-------|
| | Issue of CAMR | Marriages registered in HK | Total | Issue of CAMR | Marriages registered in HK | Total |
| 1986 | 15,073 | 703 | 15,776 | 596 | 79 | 675 |

| | | | | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1991 | 20,630 | 590 | 21,220 | 1,300 | 90 | 1,390 |
| 1996 | 22,349 | 2,215 | 24,564 | 1,552 | 269 | 1,821 |
| 1999 | 14,752 | 3,054 | 17,806 | 1,118 | 369 | 1,487 |
| 2001 | 13,211 | 5,169 | 18,380 | 1,636 | 723 | 2,359 |
| 2002 | 10,127 | 7,724 | 17,851 | 1,394 | 977 | 2,371 |
| 2003 | 7,501 | 10,185 | 17,686 | 1,083 | 1,324 | 2,407 |
| 2004 | 7,842 | 13,126 | 20,968 | 1,504 | 1,888 | 3,392 |

Source: Census & Statistics Department, 2005: Table 1.12

For family with new arrivals from the Mainland, the LFPR of parents decreased from 69.9% in 1996 to 62.5% in 2001. The corresponding number of economically inactive parents increased from 35,100 persons in 1996 to 69,200 persons in 2001. A major concern is their lack of adequate financial and other resources in supporting their children for personal development such as to participate in extra-curricula activities, or acquiring education-related equipment, etc. Statistics also reveal that a higher proportion, compared to local families, of receiving social assistance payment was found among the families with new arrivals. Between March 1999 and December 2002, the number of these cases involving new arrivals has increased from 24,400 to 36,000 (an increase of 48%), while the total cases have increased from 232,800 to 266,600 (an increase of 14%). In 2002, 14.9% of the CSSA recipients are new arrivals.

Domestic violence cases, in particular child abuses and spouse battering, are on the rise over the years (Table 6). In January to August, 2007, the number of domestic violence cases reported surged to 4,967 (*Mingpao*, 20/9/2007, p.A9). According to a household survey conducted in 2003-04, about 4% of the child respondents indicated they had experienced severe physical assault by their parent(s), whereas about 2% of respondents were physically injured by their spouses during the 12 months prior to enumeration (Chan, 2005). The figures reflect the intensity of family conflicts.

Table 6: Domestic Violence

| Domestic Violence | 1996 | 2001 | 2005 | Increase 1996-2005 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-----------------------|
| Number of Domestic Violence cases reported | 1,251 | 1,213 | 2,628 | 110.1% |
| Domestic Violence Cases/100,000 households | 67.4 | 59.1 | 115.0 | 70.6% |
| Maltreatment of spouses | N.A. | 2,433 | 3,598 | 47.9% (02-05) |
| Maltreatment of children | 311 | 535 | 763 | 145.3% |

Source: Committee on Strategic Development, 2006

With better education and new awareness, female tends to have higher participation in labor market, especially among the younger age groups since 1990s (Table 7). We have more dual-earner families: the number of working couples with children aged under 18 was 344,900 in mid-2006, compared to 315,700 in 1996 (Committee on Strategic Development,

2006). While they have to work for longer and longer hours (Table 8), or even work across the border, issue relating to family-work balance, such as negative impacts on health, quality of family life and relationship among family members, caring of children and other family members have complicated the family conditions. Conflicts resulted can be the sources of destabilizing the family and the relationships, at a time when families are facing with more demanding parenting and caring requirement.

Table 7: Female LFPR (in percentage)

| Age | 1976 | 1981 | Age | 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
|-------------------|------|----------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 15-19 | 48.0 | 42.7 | 15-19 | 31.7 | 25.7 | 18.5 | 15.5 | 13.1 |
| 20-24 | 74.7 | 80.0 | 20-24 | 84.3 | 81.7 | 77.6 | 72.5 | 71.3 |
| 25-34 | 49.3 | 55.8 | 25-29 | 71.5 | 79.7 | 82.9 | 86.7 | 87.4 |
| | | | 30-34 | 55.4 | 59.2 | 69.1 | 76.3 | 79.2 |
| | 45.5 | 53.3 | 35-39 | 52.8 | 52.4 | 56.9 | 65.9 | 72.2 |
| | | | 40-44 | 56.3 | 54.0 | 54.3 | 60.5 | 67.3 |
| 45-54 | 41.1 | 47.0 | 45-49 | 52.1 | 52.3 | 51.5 | 56.3 | 62.8 |
| | | | 50-54 | 40.3 | 41.7 | 39.4 | 47.4 | 52.9 |
| Female overall | 45.0 | 47.8 (10-12/1981) | | 48.9 | 47.9 | 47.8 | 50.7 | 52.6 |
| Male overall LFPR | 80.7 | 81.8 | | 80.5 | 78.9 | 75.7 | 73.0 | 71.0 |

Sources: Census & Statistics Department, *Annual Digest of Statistics, various years*

Table 8: Working Hour for Dual-earner Family and Single-parent Family

| | 1993 | 1996 | 2001 | 2006 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Couples with children aged under 18 and both being employed | | | | |
| Both parents with long hours of work (≥ 60 hrs / week) | 11,300 | 13,400 | 18,000 | 17,100 |
| Either parent with long hours of work (≥ 60 hrs / week) | 31,800 | 47,700 | 62,800 | 71,300 |
| Single parents with long hours of work (≥ 60 hrs / week) | 3,200 | 4,200 | 5,900 | 9,200 |

Source: Committee on Strategic Development, 2006

The changing family structure, in fact, reflects the changing values concerning family. Study by Lau coined the classical concept of 'utilitarianistic familism', argues that individuals' calculative attitude shapes the family structure and process, and with other individuals and groups. These utilitarianistic considerations will manifest in the economic interdependence among members, and drawing of boundary into or out of the familial group (1981, 1982).

The Social Indicators Surveys conducted in 1988 and 1995 provide us more data. In both surveys, the findings show that, in a general sense, the familial values were still conservative though there was significant variation reflecting a trend of liberalization from the

conventional values. For example, in 1988 survey, there was a split response to the statement: 'children are not necessarily obliged to support their parents' with a quarter (26.3%) of respondent agreed with that. On husband-wife gender role differentiation, two-fifth (40.8%) of the respondents support the more traditional thinking about the arrangement of gender roles, while 47.5% disagreed about this.⁶ In terms of values on marriage, the attitudes were on the whole conservative, except divorce (Lee, 1991) (Table 9).

Table 9: Attitudes towards Familial Norms

| Attitudes towards sexual norms | Very much against accepting | Against accepting | It depends | Accept | Very much accept |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------|--------|------------------|
| Cohabitation marriage | 9.4 | 48.8 | 15.1 | 26.0 | 0.7 |
| Divorce | 7.1 | 39.7 | 30.9 | 21.3 | 0.7 |
| Pregnancy before marriage | 8.9 | 51.1 | 12.5 | 4.4 | 0.5 |
| Men having extra-material relations | 20.8 | 64.3 | 7.8 | 7.1 | 0.0 |
| Sex with casual matters | 18.0 | 70.1 | 7.5 | 4.4 | 0.0 |
| Women having extra-material relations | 25.7 | 64.6 | 5.9 | 3.8 | 0.0 |
| Homosexuality | 38.7 | 53.9 | 3.8 | 3.6 | 0.0 |

Source: Lee, 1991

The 1995 follow-up survey did not show a revolutionary shift, it shows a further relaxation of the attitude, in which people were more tolerant than before. Though slightly more than half of the respondents would advise young women and men to 'marry without cohabitation', and another close to 20 percents already recommend them to 'cohabit first and marry later'. While comparing the attitudes on various outside-marriage activities in both studies, there was a trend of liberalization. Only 47.3% of women respondents and 38.3% of men respondents disapprove cohabitation, compared to an overall percentage of 58.2% in 1988 survey. In the 1995 Social Indicator Survey, 57.7% of respondents disagreed that 'it is better to have a bad marriage than to have no marriage at all'. Only 35.4% of the respondents agreed that 'married people are generally happier than unmarried people' compared to 37.8% disagreed with that. In these answers, women respondent shown greater skepticism towards marriage and marital happiness (Lee & Lu, 1997). Lee and Lu conclude that, 'the description of marriage as an institution in crisis is perhaps exaggerated. Nevertheless, there are signs of the institution in decline, as evidenced by among others, more liberal sexual attitudes and a rather widely shared sense of skepticism about marital happiness.' (*ibid*: 199)

For attitude concerning raising child, in a survey conducted by Breakthrough in late 2005 to early 2006, 85.6% of the respondents agreed that they prepare to have children when they get

⁶ Noted that the same survey also shown that, there were discrepancies between this response pattern with the reality. Women still shouldered majority of the roles and burdens. This might be another source of conflict in families.

married, but the percentage drops to 62.3% among those respondents who have not married. However, 33.7% of the respondents considered that there was no taken-for-granted connection between marriage and having the next generation. Among those respondents already married, 11.4% agreed that raising children is a burden of their life. 20% of them will shed the child care burden to others if they found such tasks negatively affect their personal development (Breakthrough, 2006).

As argued by Kung *et al*, the conception of marriage in Hong Kong is moving from a traditional, patriarchal, utilitarian mode to a modern, egalitarian and companionate one (2004). While adopting a similar stance, Kung *et al* remind us that women, as well as Hong Kong society are struggling with marriage ideal informed by Western liberalism and traditional Chinese Confucianism (2004). Lee points out how middle class women suffering from the dual role as full-time worker and their domestic responsibilities, as laid down by the traditional values (2002).

Similarly, Chan and Lee place the family in a position shaping by two cultural forces -- Chinese traditionalism and Western modernism (1995). Chow argues that while most values traditionally held dear by the people in Hong Kong are not rejected outright, they certainly do not have the same binding power on individual as in the past (1996). The data shown in above demonstrate that, in deed, more and more people are opting for alternatives, following their design of their own life-course, striving for the 'best' options for them at certain life-stages.

The situations in Hong Kong share the trends in other developed countries. Families are under stress and facing the risks resulted from both external and internal forces. The trend of individualization has led to more alternative in person's life-course planning and hence new structures and new (or intensified) risks facing the families and individuals - single-parent family, cross-border family, split family, reconstituted family, dual-earner family, weakening or declining binding power of beliefs in marriage, sex, inter-personal responsibilities such as filial piety and commitment, prevalence of domestic violence, discrepancies between the men and women's expectation on gender roles, etc.. Families and their relationships are becoming negotiated and selected - similar to a 'patchwork family' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Solidarity within the family is weakened.

Managing Family - public intervention and social services

Though the conventional family structure and families are still intact, the changing, if not

worsening, situations warrant our intervention. Intervention can be from the individual (family) and public levels. Individuals are by no means passive and waiting for the best to come. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have classified the strategies into avoidance, negotiation and repression, in the two broad types of preventive and acute (mediating and coping) strategies (Table 10). These strategies and personal practices are adopted as self-protective strategies which place a premium on the individuals' interests.

Table 10: Conflict Reduction Strategies

| | Preventive strategies -- prior to living together and starting a family | Acute strategies -- after starting to live together and having a family |
|--|---|---|
| Avoidance Objective conflict reduction | Choice of partner Alternatives to traditional family model | Reduction of man's outside work commitments |
| Negotiation Inter-subjective conflict reduction | Prenuptial agreement | Psychological warfare |
| Repression Subjective conflict reduction | Unrealistic plans of women for a 'dual role' | Self-deception and family myths |

Source: Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: Table 7.1

Some of these individual and familial practices are not uncommon in Hong Kong and elsewhere. Public interventions are also providing to facilitate the choice of these strategies: for example, seeking pre-marital and marital counseling, social skills training and mate-selection for the youth, and child care assistance.

Throughout the decades since 1970s, the Hong Kong government has more or less maintained a basic principle that family is a vital component of society cannot be matched by any other institution, which provides an intimate environment in which physical care, mutual support and emotional security are normally available. The basic direction of family policy⁷ is 'strengthen, rather than detract from, the functions of a family' (*Policy Address, 2006/07*: para. 36) so as to avoid giving the impression that it is manipulating family's functions or adding any responsibilities to it. The government insisted that 'it should be duly recognised that family is also one of the most personal social space that should be safeguarded' and 'public support for the family should not become too intrusive to family affairs nor should it be used as a means of social engineering' (Commission on Strategic Development, 2006: para 2). This is in line of the traditional belief of resolving family (private) matters by themselves (Chow, 1996).

⁷ There is no overt and stated family policy in Hong Kong, but a cluster of services reflecting general orientation.

However, that does not mean that the government can simply ignore the family risks. In the discussion paper prepared for the Committee on Strategic Development, it stated that ‘personal choice of lifestyle among our younger generation’ have changed which has ‘further diluted traditional family values’, and led to many different forms of families. The paper suggested that,

As a result, the traditional family system is under considerable stress. Coupled with the economic downturn in earlier years, the changing education system, the weakening of family value and solidarity etc., concerns have been raised on the weakening of family functions, deterioration of quality of family life, increasing stress to family, culminating crises to family violence and abuses, etc. (2006: para 4).

The key for the solution, as suggested by the paper, is ‘whether family members know how to share and live with each other with love and care’ (*ibid*). In other words, that is how they negotiate their personal biographies to build up a common rhythm of life.

In a Legislative Council debate⁸ on family policy, in 2001, the then Secretary of Health and Welfare, Dr. E K Yeoh, took a liberal position that ‘families today may comprise adults with or without children, single-parents, and those who live partly across the border’. The government’s concern is to and not to intervene, ‘but rather the extent to which government should intervene and whether this is desirable’. In the debate, Yeoh argued for a cautious attitude,

In some places, you may even say that we have too many policies because it’s really in states and places where people are really quite afraid of government intervention. These policies may not be welcomed. We believe that given the diverse, complex and changing nature of families, that this is a more appropriate approach. This provides support to families, taking into account of family perspectives in the formulation of policies affecting the family, with a view to promoting the well-being of diverse types of families.

Such position can be both conservative and progress, in the sense that it advocate a passive public policy but at the same time recognize the diversity of the family structures and values.

Nevertheless, no matter how reluctant the government is, increasing public intervention is almost unavoidable. Public intervention into family can be divided into two board types: legislation and social services. The former specifies the requirements on the family members’ behaviour as in respective family positions by law. For example, law prohibits violence and

⁸ Please refer to the Legislative Council Hansard, May 16, 2001. URL: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/general/chinese/counmtg/yr00-04/meetings.htm#mtg1605>

abusive behaviour to family members.

For those behaviour related to relationship and personal morality (e.g., love and commitment, filial piety), it will be promoted through various social services including: family life education, family and marital counseling. The list of family services in Hong Kong also include: family support services and residential / institutional care services (for children and elderly). The list can also include social assistance schemes and taxation policies⁹ which give incentives to promote desirable intra-family behaviour, the effort to insert a gender perspective in scrutinizing policies and employment for family members. The latest initiatives by the government are to the 'Child Development Fund' to minimize the impact of cross-generation poverty, the promotion of 'family-friendly policy', and the possibility of setting up the 'Family Commission'.

This will be unfair to say the government is apathetic to the risks that families are facing. It has invested more resources in providing more social services coping with the family risks, and to support their family functions. But it is also valid to argue that the government is taking a cautious stance to stay away from the private personal domain.

In general, there are three major debates on policies concerning the management of family risks: the operation of how to intervene; the scope of services provided; and the ideology behind such policies. The first debate is not the focus of this paper. There is a general consensus that the current scope of provision can be and have to further expanded, especially in family counseling, tackling domestic violence and protection of the victims. There is a no way for the state to stay away from managing these risks. The focus of the following discussion will be on ideologies of the intervention: family structures and values, division between private and public, and the roles (and also responsibilities) of individuals and the state.

Management of the Family - 'why' and 'how'

The current condition in Hong Kong is, certainly, not a withdrawal of state's responsibilities. The debate is on the most appropriate roles and functions of the state in helping the families in coping risk. It is still true to comment that, while Hong Kong government is doing more

⁹ A lot of tax allowances to encourage the caring functions among family members: Married Person's Allowance, Child Allowance, Single Parent Allowance, Dependent Parent Allowance, Dependent Grandparent Allowance [for these two, additional amount if live together], Dependent Brother or Dependent Sister Allowance, Disabled Dependent Allowance, Dependent Grandparent Allowance, and deduction of elderly residential care expenses.

and more (and intensified intervention), it is still hesitate to be too intrusive that it might colonise and disempower the family. At present, no one cast any doubt on the claim of doing our best to preserve the family. A further concern is in fact on what kinds of family that we want to preserve.

It is true that the existing policy discourse tend to romanticize the family in the old days, and take it as nostalgia to be achieved. We have to be extremely careful in accepting this assumption unconditionally, having no data to argue how the old families actually performed. As a matter of fact, families in the old days can be full of tensions and mistrust, hatred and violence, though they might still choose to be together, subordinate their personal favour for mutual dependence and satisfying their needs (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). 'There is perhaps more nostalgia surrounding the lost haven of the family than for any other institution with its roots in the past (Giddens, 2000: 71).' 'The problem with family is that family has been isolated as the only utopian site, which leads to it being the least utopian site of stress, struggle, and survival (Agger & Shelton, 2007: 67).'

Given the current understanding of family strength, we have to accept the notion of 'family of limited liability', and reject over-romanticisation of it. We can no longer assume a list of standard functions and values, and the nature of relationship, are there, unconditionally and taken-for-granted in all 'post-familial families'. Family is now a negotiated space, with its relationships 'contingent' upon many factors. The 'normal chaos of love' is the common state (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Due to functional specialization and development of social services, conventional family functions have been desegregated from it legitimately. Family is no longer a pure private domain and as argued by Agger and Shelton,

If we accept less from family and more from the public sphere, while simultaneously recognizing that family is always already public and political, we can reconstruct all social relationships as, in effect, 'families', a genuinely radical agenda (2007: 67).

Certainly, in that new departure, there is no possibility for the 'conservative u-turn', arguing for going back to the old conventional 'good' family (which normally means female retreats to the old gender roles), blaming the risks are caused by the feminist demands should not be encouraged and accepted. The success of the feminist agenda, advocating a transformation of social and familial structure and values, and redistribution of power between sexes, can only be truly successful if men 'are involved to a greater extent in the production of family welfare is there a hope that the growing doubts among women and the associated questioning of family culture will give way to a new stabilization of the family' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 83).

Women engagement in work is important, both to herself (in terms of independence), and to the family (in terms of financial stability). To strike a good family-work balance is extremely

difficult, if not possible, due to increasing efficient intrusion to the family by work. ICT contributes to the acceleration, instantaneity, immediacy, fluidity and the flux of boundaries between the two are the defining characteristics of contemporary life experience (Agger & Shelton, 2007). Flexibilization of working hours also intrude family life as it produce irregular and fluctuating tempos that further complicate the efforts to tie together the threads of family members' different rhythms (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). While it is impossible to strike a perfect balance between work and family, and it will also become unfair to put all the burden / sacrifice by identified members – normally the female, it is necessary to provide life chance guarantees to them who make the sacrifice, to move in and out, and adequate compensations, over the life course (Lewis, 2001).

Certainly, continue the institutional solution by accepting the changes and the reality of family, and public responsibilities in providing more social services to the families is part of the agenda. In a general sense, the Hong Kong government has accepted that scenario. The intervention certainly goes beyond of merely providing advice and encouragement to the individuals in managing risks. Though there is still doubt on the extent of provision, there is a general support form better family support and child care services. The concern is how to make it more flexible to cater for the parents' diversified working patterns. Promoting dual-earner family (or one-and-a-half earner model) may not help to promote real gender equality, this can at least promote a more secure family finance.

While promoting institutional solution, we still have to be careful on the constraints of public intervention in private sphere. There is, as always, a continue tension between personal freedom / individual rights and the state actions. State steering 'which cuts across everyday practices is unlikely to have notable success' (Jamieson & Cunningham-Burley, 2003: 18). The more fluid, varied and personalized the less institutionalized personal relationships become, the more dangerous it is for a state to codify a specific form of family life as meriting its support (Finch, 2003). And a more fluid, varied and personalized biographies is the nature of contemporary individual and family. As suggested by Finch,

... where the state does get involved in regulating relationships beyond protecting vulnerable people, the aim of policies should be to facilitate flexibility in family life, rather than to shape it into a particular form... ensure that people have maximum opportunity to work out their own relationships as they wish, to suit the circumstances of their own lives (2003: .43).

That argument might run the risk of leading to conservative policy and withdrawal of state's responsibilities. Nevertheless, the government at least, has to contribute their efforts upon those aspects of family life where there are clear public interests, most obviously in protecting

the vulnerable people – such as the minors, the victims of domestic violence, which clearly contradict with the societal norms and violation of human rights. Provisions beyond that level will have to be negotiated between the stakeholders.

Respecting individuality and diversity does not mean tolerance of the vulnerable groups' sufferings. Still, we have to be cautious in trying to be directive and to regulate people's relationship with others and the forms of family into a single path, to steer and engineer family life into particular form. There is a delicate balance between intervention and non-intervention in individual biography. In reflexive modernity and individualized life world, variability and flexibility in family relationships are not only practiced but also regarded as acceptable (though in some cases, these are not legitimate and lawful), and the emphasis is on the optionality in relationships and individualistic nature of family relationships. In that sense, the intervention is on facilitating members to negotiate an agreement on competing biographies (Finch, 2003).

Ferguson has argued that in time of reflexive modernity, there is growing awareness of clients and hence, the power relationship between experts (and the government) and lay people will be re-appropriation and redistributed. The appropriate entry point for professionals and social services is to empower the clients to make the best informed decisions for planning their biographies (1997, 2001). Merely imposing the expert's (and state too) advice on them is no longer appropriate in this new context.

Conclusion

The concept of risk society and individualisation may not be universally applied. There are critiques on its theoretical construct and its lacking of empirical support (Dingwell, 1999; Lupton & Tulloch, 2002; Mythen, 2005). Even the core concept, individualization, used in this paper is subjected to empirical challenge (Cebulla, 2007). Whether the concept is applicable requires further examination in Hong Kong, and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, figures shown in this paper do demonstrate a changing family trend and support the claims that family is becoming more risky. The trace of individualization, that individuals are more reflexive and more concern with their own biographies, and hence alternatives forms of family and familial relationships, can be identified in Hong Kong. Similar patterns may also be identified in other advanced economies in Asia.

The family that we refer to is the 'post-familial families'. Family may not be a place of eternal romance, and instead where all types of conflict erupt and expose, which have to be managed by individuals and government. Taking a realistic assessment of public intervention, and the baseline for non-intervention, the principles of managing families have to be: starting from a firm commitment to protect the vulnerable, a real recognition of the diversity in family structure and values, a respect for individuality and personal freedom, and focus on the way on empowering members negotiating their biographies, instead of imposing one rigid frame.

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