

One Country Two Cities: Comparison of the Perceived Cohesion in Guangzhou and Hong Kong

Social cohesion and social harmony are important social agenda in both the Mainland China and Hong Kong in recent years. Wu Bangguo, chairman of the 10th NPC Standing Committee said, “We must...fully implement the law on oversight and put the focus of oversight on serious problems that affect overall reform, development and stability, that have an impact on social harmony and that cause great resentment among the masses” (People’s Daily Online, 2008). The Chinese President Hu Jintao also share Wu’s view on social harmony, “...to enhance stability and prosperity, and to ensure a stable border area by making local people rich...to achieve sound and rapid economic development, ensure people’s well being, improve their lives, enhance social harmony, improve work related to religious and ethnic affairs, and make more efforts in strengthening unity among ethnic groups” (People’s Daily Online, 2008). The Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the Great hall of the People, “[we] will continue to free our mind, stick to reform and opening up, promote social harmony and strive for new achievements in building a moderately prosperous society” (People’s Daily Online, 2008). To conclude, in China, the Civil Affairs Bureau is charged with the responsibility to promote social cohesion and social harmony in the midst of rapid economic expansion and rising disparity of wealth.

In Hong Kong, both the former and the current Chief Executives have made social cohesion and social harmony their focuses during their annual Policy Addresses. In the 1998 Policy Address, former Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa commented on urban renewal as “[the] quality of life in many of the older parts of Hong Kong contrasts unfavorably with that in our new towns. Building[s] are run-down, hygiene is poor and there is a lack of social cohesion”. When addressing moral values in his 1999 Policy Address, the former Chief Executive believed “we all desire a society of greater harmony, in which everybody respects and treats others well”. In his 2000 Policy Address, Mr. Tung addressed social cohesion and social harmony in the areas of school education, young people, and culture and sports. His addresses on social harmony and social cohesion continued during his remaining terms as the Hong Kong Chief Executive (Policy Address, 2001; 2004).

When Mr. Tsang Yam Kuen became the Hong Kong Chief Executive in 2005, he has made social harmony and social cohesion a much more important focus in his Policy Addresses (2005; 2005-06; 2006-07; 2007-08). He has addressed social

harmony with a greater part of his policy plan. In the 2005 Policy Address: Working together for Economic Development and Social Harmony (HKSAR), he mentioned in the part “Maintaining Social Harmony” that Hong Kong people have always attached great importance to social harmony. The saying “A family that lives in harmony will prosper” epitomizes harmony as a core value in our tradition. A stable environment is the prerequisite for social progress, economic prosperity, constitutional development and better living. This explains the strong desire of the public for social stability and their increasing loathing of the conflicts and confrontations that have surfaced in recent years. The public is well aware that social harmony is the foundation of stability and prosperity.

Other than social harmony, Tsang included ‘upholding social justice,’ ‘encouraging fair competition,’ ‘development of welfare services,’ ‘helping the needy,’ ‘cherishing family values,’ ‘protecting labor rights,’ and ‘environment and health’ in his plan for promoting social harmony in Hong Kong. “We cannot turn a blind eye to those factors that threaten long-term harmony...employment difficulties...declining real pay levels...polarization of the middle class; a widening income gap; an ageing population; adaptability problems...serious challenges to traditional family values” (Policy Address, 2005-06).

However, the focus on social harmony remains strong in his subsequent Policy address in which the concerns of areas expanded to ‘supporting the family,’ ‘subsidizing early childhood education,’ ‘gifted education,’ ‘community and neighborhood,’ ‘progressive development,’ and ‘mediation services’ (Policy Address 2006-07; 2007-08).

In view of these policy address, we can conclude that, in Hong Kong, both the present and the former Chief Executive of the Special Administrative Region used social cohesion and social harmony as a moral campaign to promote social stability.

Social Cohesion : Some Conceptual Discussions

Social cohesion is by itself a contested concept. As pointed out by Friedkin (2004), the more research now being conducted on social cohesion, the more confused the concept has become. As a matter of fact, social cohesion is a subject of both sociological and psychological concern. According to Friedkin (2004), social psychologists tend to place the emphasis of their definitions of social cohesion on

individual's membership in a group. For example, Festinger (1950, p.274, quoted in Freidkin, 2004, p.411) suggested that cohesion is "the resultant of all forces acting on the members of a group to remain in the group".

On the other hand, early sociologists suggested that social consensus in terms of commitment of shared values and commitment to shared social norms were essentially important for a liberal democratic society to achieve social harmony (Dahl, 1967; McKenzie and Silver, 1968). However, this view was contested by Mann (1970) who held that the values, norms and beliefs that were deemed to glue the society together were actually very general and vague. In this sense, it would be hard to establish the argument that social cohesion must be built upon shared values and shared norms, especially in a liberal and democratic society where conflicts were unavoidable.

In spite of Mann's discontent, other sociologists seem to approach social cohesion in the perspective of having shared elements in the society. A typical example is the framework of Jenson (1998), in which social cohesion is conceptualized into 5 dimensions, covering belonging versus isolation; inclusion versus exclusion; participation versus non-involvement; recognition versus rejection; and legitimacy versus illegitimacy. Within the five dimensions, the important elements include shared values and identity, equality of opportunity; as well as the respect for differences. In this light, common values might not be the only important factor for the production of social cohesion. Rather it is the ability of the society to respect, or at least tolerate, differences that matters. Furthering Jenson's work, Beauvais and Jenson (2002) suggested five possible domains of social cohesion (quoted in Chan, To and Chan (2006)), including, inter alia, common values and a civic culture; social order and social control; social solidarity and equality; social network and social capital; an attachment to place and identity. In spite of the criticism of Chan et al (2006), this framework does offer bases for operationalization. Forrest and Kearns (2001), in discussing about space and social cohesion, also based on the framework of Beauvais and Jenson (2002) and suggest that "a society lacking cohesion would be one which displayed social disorder and conflict, disparate moral values, extreme social inequality, low level of social interaction between and within communities and low levels of place attachment. However, Forrest and Kearns (2001) went on to argue that one cannot underestimate the importance of residentially-based neighbourhood networks in building social cohesion because, we learn tolerance, co-operation and acquire a sense of social order and belonging through these networks (Forrest and Kearns, 2001).

On the other hand in social policy terms, Gough and Olofsson (1999) referred social cohesion to social integration and social solidarity, and the study of social cohesion in Western capitalist states is to a considerable extent the study of the level and extent of social exclusion. The conceptualization of Gough and Olofsson (1998) is consonant with that of the European Commission. In the first report on social cohesion, the European Commission, though did not put forward a concrete definition, linked social cohesion with the objectives of the European model of society that are social solidarity, reduction of disparities and social inclusion (European Commission, 1996).

Along a similar line, Beck, Maesen, Thomese and Walker (2001) in bringing forward the concept of social quality as guiding principles for social policy in Europe also proposed to examine social exclusion, polarization, participation and empowerment, as well as social integration as dimensions of social cohesion. Accordingly, social cohesion covers such domains as economic cohesion, social status cohesion, political cohesion and altruism. Phillips and Berman (2001, 2003) in proposing a framework for studying community citizenship elucidate the way in which social cohesion is related to community and the nation state: community social cohesion serves as the basis for performing collective roles; and societal social cohesion is the infrastructure which facilitates community inclusion and empowerment. Phillips and Bernman (2001) went on to suggest that social inclusion, social cohesion and empowerment are closely connected: social inclusion provides the basis for empowerment through scaffolding equal opportunity; while social cohesion enables empowerment through the creation of cohesive networks and infrastructure in the community.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in coming up with a dictionary-like definition of social cohesion, there are, however, certain common elements that we can draw upon: 1) shared norms and values; 2) a sense of shared identity or belonging to a common community; 3) a sense of continuity and stability; 4) a society with institutions for sharing risks and providing collective welfare; 5) equitable distribution of rights, opportunities, wealth, and income; and 6) a strong civil society and active citizenship.

On the other hand, how to measure social cohesion is also a highly contested issue, not least since different disciplines tend to emphasize different aspects of the condition. Beyond this there is also the problem of the unit of analysis being considered. Social cohesion can be examined within small groups or local

communities; within larger, virtual or distributed communities; at the level of whole societies, and indeed at the global level. Much of the quantitative analysis has focused on the values, attitudes and behaviors of the individuals which may be deemed conducive to bonding within communities.

Social cohesion in Hong Kong and Guangzhou:

The first social cohesion survey in Hong Kong was reported by Chan and Chan (2006) though different political and district campaign had used the wording of social cohesion. They adopted the framework of both vertical, which taps those between society and the government, and horizontal dimension, which is concerned with both feelings and actions of members of society, of the concept.

It is found that horizontally, society feels cohesive but the feeling is not supported by corresponding behavior such as participation in organizations and engagement in giving and helping. Vertically, society has much higher trust in bureaucracies of justice administration than the executive branch of the government. They concluded that however cohesively society feels, it is achieved with little institutional mediation and social engagement.

Vertical and horizontal components in social cohesion have been addressed in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan, 2006). A mere 4.44 score to vertical cohesion while horizontal cohesion received a score of 6.14. The scores indicate that the respondents feel that the relationship between society and the government is much poorer than that among members of society.

Forrest and Yip (2007) studied the social change and social interaction at the level of urban neighborhood by means of a social survey of three contrasting neighborhoods undertaken in Guangzhou. The study has successfully explored interalia the meaning of neighborhood, sense of local belonging and community, and patterns and incidence of mutual assistance. In the study, perceptions of and attitudes towards the neighborhood, commitment and sense of belonging are captured. Obviously the domains measured are also the key components of social cohesion.

Perceived cohesion encompasses an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership in the group. Perceived cohesion is an attribute of individuals in a group that reflects an appraisal of their own relationship to the group. Appraisal of their relationship to the group results in judgment of their personal sense of how much they belong to the

group and their personal feelings of morale associated with membership in the group.

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) created the Perceived Cohesion Scale, a six-item measure reflecting two underlying dimensions of cohesion: belonging and morale (see Table 1). The stability of the scale was further examined in a sample of 102 students from a small college and 110 residents of a mid-sized city. Confirmatory factor analysis was used as well to assess their two-factor model of cohesion. Chin et al. (1999) administered questionnaires containing the adapted PCS to 330 undergraduate subjects (forming 70 groups) at a Canadian university, with group sizes ranging from 4 to 5 participants, comprised of a balanced mix of males and females. An evaluation of this small-group PCS by Chin et al. (1999) revealed that the scale exhibited excellent psychometric properties, similar to the original scale. In summary, Chin et al. (1999) was successful in extending PCS to the small group setting. Salisbury et al (2006) further extend PCS to the virtual team context by inviting 110 undergraduate respondents of three universities. Among the 83 responses (response rate 75.4%), the cohesion measures were identical to Chin et al. (1999) except for slightly different anchors. Since the cohesiveness measure has been validated (Chin et al., 1999), the scale will be adopted in this study to measure the sense of belonging of and morale of the residents in Hong Kong and Guangzhou respectively.

Table 1: Perceived Cohesion Scale

Sense of Belonging Subscale:

Item 1: I feel a sense of belonging to _____.

Item 2: I feel that I am a member of the _____ community.

Item 3: I see myself as part of the _____ community.

Feelings of Morale Subscale:

Item 1: I am enthusiastic about _____.

Item 2: I am happy to be at [live in] _____.

Item 3: _____ is one of the best schools [cities] in the nation.

Responses are recorded on Likert scales ranging from 0 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“neutral”) to 10 (“strongly agree”). The name of cities, Wanchai and Guangzhou are substituted in the scale.

Methods

200 Respondents from the categories of 1) Elderly of or over 55 years old; 2) Employed; 3) Adolescent of 10 to 24 years old; 4) General residents; and 6) Women, in the district of Wanchai, one of the district in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, are invited to fill in the scale individually, with the guidance of the interview. The personal profile of the respondents is collected as well.

Participants

A total of 2,127 respondents aged 7-96 completed the questionnaires. Among these 1,127 were recruited from Hong Kong and 1,000 were from Guangzhou. The respondent pool consisted of 892 male and 1,233 female with a mean age of 38.82 years (SD=20.17). One-fifth of respondents were aged below 20 years, and 60% were aged 20-59. More than half (60%) of them have completed high school education, with 30% attained tertiary education or above. Approximately one third of the respondents earned a monthly income of HK\$5000 (US\$641) or below, and about one half of them earned an income below HK\$10000. Those who reported a monthly income of HK\$30000 constitutes 12% of the overall sample. A substantial proportion of the respondents were full time student (37%), followed by employee/self-employed (28%), retiree (19%), home maker (8%), unemployed (6%) and other occupational status (3%).

Table 2. Sample Characteristics

Variables	Data Collection Sites					
	All respondents		Hong Kong		Guangzhou	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Age						
Under 20	20.8	(414)	20.9	(207)	20.7	(207)
20-29	18.8	(374)	12.8	(127)	24.7	(247)
30-39	17.0	(338)	13.5	(134)	20.4	(204)
40-49	12.4	(247)	15.6	(154)	9.3	(93)
50-59	11.7	(232)	11.6	(115)	11.7	(117)
60-69	8.6	(171)	9.3	(92)	7.9	(79)
70-79	7.0	(139)	10.2	(101)	3.8	(38)
80 or above	3.7	(74)	6.0	(59)	1.5	(15)
Age, years [Mean(SD)]	38.82	(20.17)	42.07	(21.95)	35.62	(17.68)
Gender						
Male	42.0	(892)	41.3	(466)	42.7	(426)
Female	58.0	(1233)	58.7	(661)	57.3	(572)
Education level						
No formal education	4.2	(89)	4.7	(52)	3.8	(37)
Primary or below	10.8	(226)	12.6	(141)	8.6	(85)
Junior High school	19.9	(424)	17.4	(194)	23.4	(230)
Senior High school	24.4	(518)	24.3	(271)	25.1	(247)

Matriculation	10.3	(220)	10.6	(118)	10.4	(102)
Tertiary education	11.9	(254)	11.9	(133)	12.3	(121)
University education or above	17.3	(367)	18.5	(206)	16.4	(161)
Family income¹						
1-5000	34.6	(737)	11.7	(132)	60.5	(605)
5001-10000	15.2	(324)	7.2	(81)	24.3	(243)
10001-15000	7.0	(149)	6.7	(76)	7.3	(73)
15001-20000	8.6	(182)	12.7	(143)	3.9	(39)
20001-30000	6.2	(131)	9.7	(109)	2.2	(22)
Above 30000	11.6	(246)	20.2	(228)	1.8	(18)
Not reported	16.8	(358)	31.8	(358)	0.0	(0)
Occupational Status						
Employee / Self Employed	27.7	(590)	10.7	(121)	46.9	(469)
Full time students	37.3	(793)	48.9	(551)	24.2	(242)
Home maker	7.6	(162)	11.1	(125)	3.7	(37)
Retiree	18.6	(395)	22.5	(254)	14.1	(141)
Unemployed	5.7	(122)	1.3	(15)	10.7	(107)
Others	3.1	(65)	5.4	(61)	0.4	(4)
Sense of Cohesion						
Cohesion Score ² [Mean(SD)]	70.79	(24.04)	65.46	(24.10)	76.78	(22.53)
Sense of Belonging subscale ³ [M(SD)]	7.13	(2.61)	6.64	(2.59)	7.69	(2.53)
Morale subscale ⁴ [Mean(SD)]	7.02	(2.42)	6.45	(2.42)	7.67	(2.26)

Note:

1. Family income is based on local currency of Hong Kong (HK\$)and Guangzhou (Yuen), the exchange rate from HK Dollar to Yuen is 1: 0.87
2. Higher cohesion score indicates a higher level of cohesion. The score range from 0-100.
3. Higher sense of belonging subscale score indicates a higher sense of belonging to the community. The score range from 0-10.
4. Higher Morale subscale score indicates a higher morale as being a member of the community. The score range from 0-10.

Measures

Perceived social cohesion was measured by Perceived Cohesion Scale (PCS). The scale was translated by experienced linguist into Chinese for use in the present study. The reliability of Chinese translation of PCS was found to be excellent with Cronbach alpha ranging 0.92, 0.93 and 0.83 for the full scale, Sense of Belonging subscale and Morale subscale, respectively. Principal component analysis was performed on the 6 items to estimate the number of valid components in the PCS. A single factor has been identified (Eigenvalue >1), which explained 72.58% of the total variance of the scale. Since the result confirmed the unidimensional nature of PCS, only PCS full-scale score was used for the present study. For easy comparison, the final Cohesion score was computed to range from 0 to 100, with higher value indicating higher level of cohesion.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 15.0 for Windows. To determine the whether there are significant difference in perceive cohesion between the two sites, multiple regression was performed to explore the association between the dummy variable 'Site' and the cohesion score. In order to control for difference in socio-demographic profile of the two sites, age, gender, educational attainment and family income were entered together in the regression.

Data from the two sites were then analyzed separately, for social cohesion in the two sites might have been influenced by each community's unique socio-economic circumstances. Demographic variables like age, educational attainment, family income and occupational status were used to regress on perceived cohesion score. The regression models from the two sites were then compared to contrast the common and unique predictors of social cohesion.

Results

The distribution of socio-demographic variables in the two sites is described in Table 2. As anticipated, the age distribution, family income structure and occupational status of the subjects of the two sites were quite different. , the Hong Kong sample tended to earn higher income, be older (mean age 42 years) and composed more of students, home makers and retirees. The Guangzhou sample on the other hand, has a higher proportion of employee (or self-employed) and unemployed respondents. In terms of perceived cohesion, the Hong Kong sample

reported significantly lower level of cohesion than the Guangzhou sample. This difference remained so even after age, gender, educational level and family income were controlled ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$) (Please refer to Table 3 for details).

Table 3. Association between Site and Perceived Cohesion after Controlling for Age, Gender, Educational Attainment and Family Income

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	Sig.
	B	S.E.	β	P-value
Site (Hong Kong)	-11.11	1.46	-0.23	<.001
Age	0.20	0.07	0.17	<.01
Gender (Male)	-5.15	1.81	-0.11	<.01
Educational Attainment	-2.25	0.54	-0.17	<.001
Family income	-0.18	0.54	-0.01	0.74
Constant	66.82	5.49		<.001
N			1,669	
Variance explained (%)			11.5	
F statistics			43.29	
Sig.			<.001	

In separate analysis of the Hong Kong and Guangzhou sample, age ($\beta_{HK} = .17, p < .01, \beta_{GZ} = .42, p < .001$) and gender ($\beta_{HK} = -.11, p < .01, \beta_{GZ} = -.07, p < .05$) were found to be significantly associated with perceived cohesion. Being older and being female favorably predicted higher level of cohesion in both sites. Educational attainment was negatively associated with cohesion among respondents from Hong Kong, ($\beta = -.17, p < .001$), but positively associated with cohesion among respondents from Guangzhou, ($\beta = .08, p < .05$). Family income was not a significant predictor of social cohesion in both sites. As for occupational status, retiree was associated with higher level of cohesion in Hong Kong, ($\beta = .17, p < .05$); employee and students were associated with higher level of cohesion in Guangzhou, ($\beta = .15, p < .01$) and ($\beta = .47, p < .001$).

Table 4. Prediction of Sense of Cohesion in Hong Kong and Guangzhou using Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor Variables	Sites							
	Hong Kong				Guangzhou			
	Unstandardized		Standardized		Unstandardized		Standardized	
	Coefficient		Coefficient	Sig.	Coefficient		Coefficient	Sig.
B	S.E.	β	p-value	B	S.E.	β	p-value	
Age	0.20	0.07	0.17	<0.01	0.53	0.06	0.42	<0.001
Gender (Male)	-5.15	1.81	-0.11	<0.01	-2.94	1.42	-0.07	<0.05
Educational Attainment	-2.25	0.54	-0.17	<0.001	1.08	0.46	0.08	<0.05
Family income	-0.18	0.54	-0.01	0.74	0.55	0.69	0.03	0.42
Occupational status								
Reference group =unemployed								
Employee/Self employed	-3.41	4.45	-0.05	0.45	6.77	2.43	0.15	<0.01
Student	1.98	3.93	0.04	0.61	24.51	2.96	0.47	<0.001
Home maker	7.10	4.56	0.10	0.12	0.39	9.75	0.00	0.97
Retiree	9.94	4.84	0.17	<0.05	-0.32	3.08	-0.01	0.92
Constant	66.82	5.49		<0.001	44.37	3.81		<0.001
N		686				946		
Variance explained (%)		20.8				11.6		
F statistics		22.18				15.36		
Sig.		<.001				<.001		

Further analysis of the relationship between age and perceived cohesion showed that age increase with sense of cohesion from age 20 years onward, up to the age 60 years. After age 60, the increase become more gradual (Figure 1). As for the relationship between educational level and sense of cohesion, the Hong Kong and Guanzhou samples demonstrated different trends. The respondents from Hong Kong showed a continual drop in the level of cohesion at increasing educational attainment. Whereas, the respondents from Guangzhou showed a similarly high level of cohesion for those with no formal education, an increasing level of cohesion for those with primary to senior high school education, and a stable but much higher level of cohesion for those with matriculation education or above (Figure 2). Figure 3 showed the difference between the two samples at different occupational sectors. The employed respondents or students in Hong Kong showed a substantially lower level of cohesion than their Guangzhou counterparts. For the home-makers, retirees or unemployed respondents, respondents from the two sites showed similar level of perceived cohesion (Figure 3).

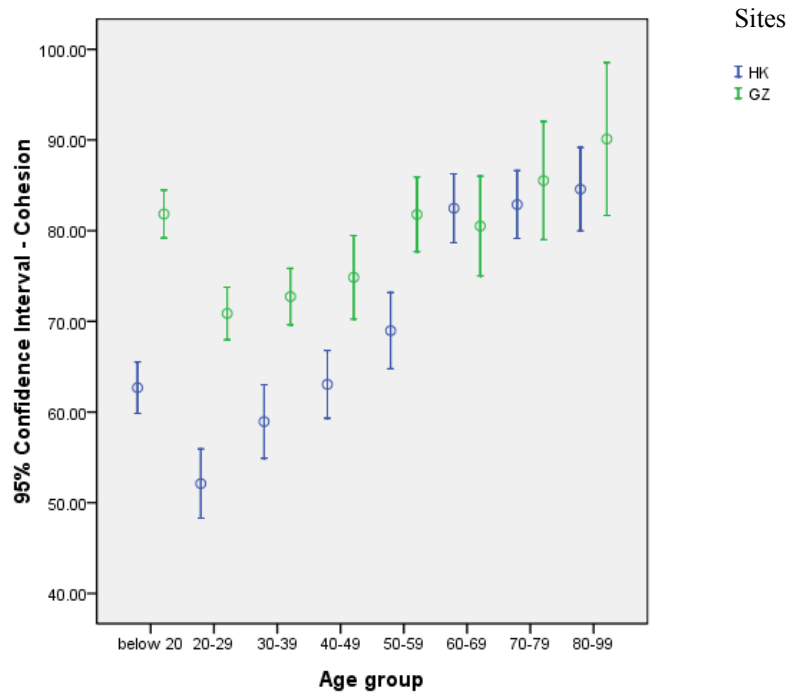


Figure 1:
Associations between Age and Sense of Cohesion in the two sites

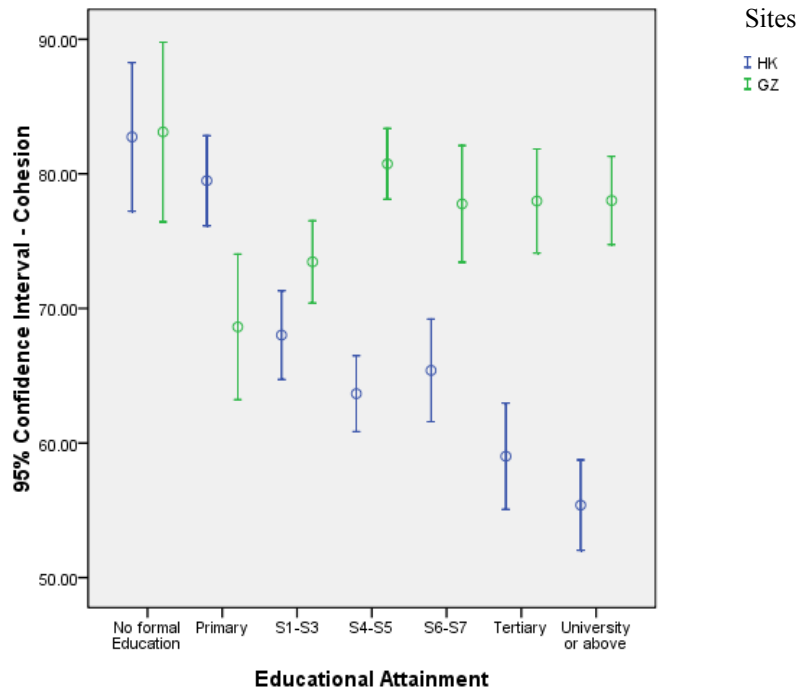


Figure 2:
Associations between Educational Attainment and Sense of Cohesion in the two sites

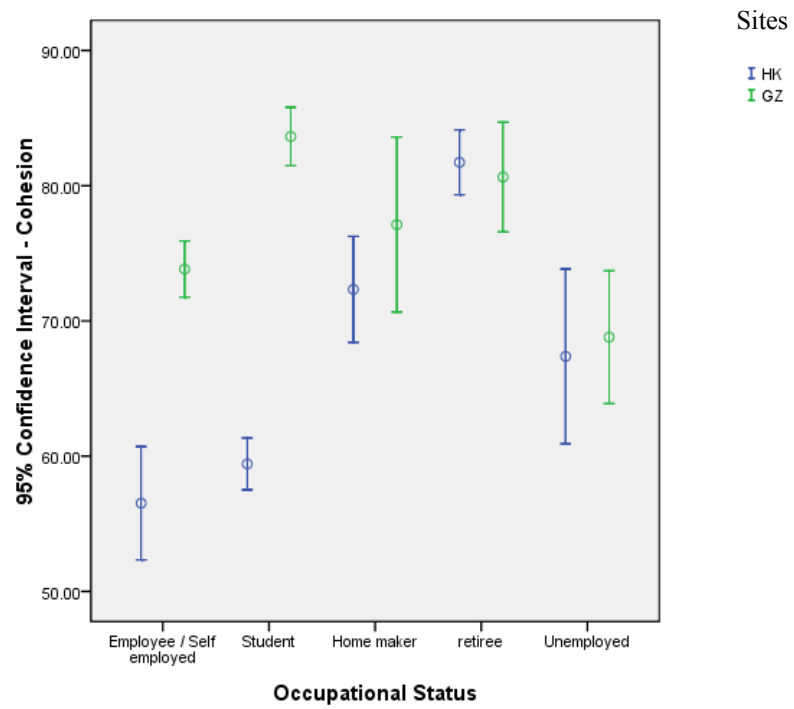


Figure 3:
Associations between Occupational Status and Sense of Cohesion in the two sites

Discussion

We must acknowledge from the outset that our findings only show the perceived social cohesion of the residents in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Although as pointed out by Phillips and Berman (2003), social cohesion in a community involves more elements of subjective appraisal, and thus may be possible to be assessed by means of some sort of quantitative measurement, we are aware that there are other objective factors such as social equality as well as income disparity, etc which are also important in creating social cohesion (or otherwise division). In this light, the following discussions reflect an attempt to draw some insight from our findings rather than to conclude and establish that one society is necessarily more cohesive than the other. Moreover, this study does not provide sufficient data for an adequate explanation, and that is why we do not attempt to be explanatory. Having said this, however, there are several interesting findings which we should like to highlight for further social policy discussion.

First, in spite of the fact that social cohesion has been campaigned by both the Hong Kong SAR and the Chinese central governments, the Hong Kong sample reported significantly lower level of cohesion ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$) than the Guangzhou counterpart, after controlled for age, gender, educational level and family income. This piece of finding may appear to many to be totally unsurprising. As a matter of fact, the domain of social solidarity, reflected in the equitable distribution of wealth and income is badly performed in Hong Kong. According to a very recent report released by the United Nation Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT (2008), Hong Kong has the highest Gini-Coefficient in Asia (0.533), which indicates that the disparity between the rich and the poor is the worst in Asian cities. Contrasting with Hong Kong, in spite of the rapid economic development which at some point enlarge the wealth gap between the rich and the poor in China, Beijing still has the lowest disparity of wealth in the world, where its Gini-Coefficient is 0.22. With minimal differences in tax and other redistributive policies between Beijing and Guangzhou, one can estimate that the disparity of wealth between Hong Kong and Guangzhou is as huge as between Hong Kong and Beijing. According to Hong Kong census statistics, the bottom 10% of income earners in Hong Kong only shared 1.4% of the total income in 2006, while the top 10% earned 40.9%, representing 30 times the income of the bottom 10% (Census and Statistics Department, 2007). The huge income gap inevitably weakens the basis of social cohesion.

In addition to income disparity, welfare mechanism and provisions in the two

cities may also contribute to the differences in perceived social cohesion between Hong and Guangzhou respondents. In Hong Kong, there is only minimal provision for risks sharing and risk protection as far as unemployment, old age, low income as well as other income loss are concerned. This is at least true for the majority of the income earners. Unless one is a civil servant, one is not protected by a retirement pension. For the majority of income earners, the only retirement protection is the Mandatory Provident Fund which is without any risk sharing effect. On the other hand in Guangzhou, although the state has abandoned the 'big rice bowl' and thus has transferred the sole caring responsibility to becoming one that is shared by the state, the enterprise and the individual and family. The state and the enterprise still share significant contribution in basic risk protection, in spite that individual differences are allowed. In this sense, the mechanism that enable risks sharing is largely absent in Hong Kong, at least as far as unemployment and retirement are concerned. Thus, the absence of the spirit of mutual responsibility in Hong Kong would likely weaken the sense of community and the perceived cohesion.

Not only that social policy in Hong Kong has become more punitive, the welfare discourse is also dividing rather than uniting. For example, in attempting to contain public expenditure in old age allowance, the government first intended to introduce means test into this provision which was all along universally provided. In justifying this de-entitlement measure the government blamed the increase of old people as the cause for making public burden unbearable. Other examples could be seen in dividing the general population and the social service user groups, such as the new immigrants from China (and their children); the single-parents (and their children), and sometimes the unemployed (who are not responsible for self reliance). If we look at our counterpart in Guangzhou, social services have not been used as a dividing measure and the Guangzhou municipal government has rarely relied on dividing measure to control public expenditure.

As far as social and political identity is concerned, research findings have shown that more Hong Kong people tended to identify themselves as Chinese citizens rather than simply Hong Kong people, compared to the situation when Hong Kong was under British rule (HKU POP Site: <http://hkupop.hku.hk/>). However, as argued by Mann (1970), this could be only a very general political label with limited explanatory power. It is hard to establish that Hong Kong people now have a stronger shared political identity than before. This could be reflected by the fact that when the Hong Kong SAR government intended to enact local laws to realize Article 23 of the Basic Law (concerning State security) in 2005, a consensus could hardly be reached. Throughout the process, different political groups representing different interests in

the society engaged in very dividing debates. At the end the SAR government reluctantly withdrew the bills and ended the struggle. The example is used here to suggest that a shared political identity of ‘Chinese national’ does not seem to create a good ground to unite Hong Kong people. Arguably, because of different political aspiration of the people in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, the question we have about ‘what is meant by being a Chinese national’ is bound to be different from the connotation among the people in China. After all in Hong Kong, the question of ‘what is a Chinese’ is assumed but not questioned in the midst of political correctness, and thus has not been openly debated, not to mention to have arrived at a consensus and a shared understanding. In this light, if a shared and common identity is essential for building up of social cohesion, it has to be built by genuine consensus from the grassroot, and with clear and specific understanding of the core values and spirit rather than by a vague moral and political campaign.

Conclusion

Based on the findings about perceived social cohesion, this paper attempts to give a preliminary discussion of social cohesion in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Among all the data we generated, we focused our discussion on the level of perceived cohesion and attempted to provide a related social policy discussion. We attempted to argue that the relatively lower perceived cohesion in Hong Kong compared to that of Guangzhou is, amongst other factors, related to the absence of social foundation for social cohesion, including conditions for better redistribution of social resources, shared risks and risk protection as well as the conditions for coming up with a shared social and political identity. Against this context, the SAR government’s efforts to promote social cohesion and social harmony in Hong Kong would likely become an empty moral campaign.

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