

Executive Summary

Hong Kong, a city with a long history of diversity, has recently witnessed serious controversy and confrontations over unequal economic development, livelihood issues and the changing political landscape. The deep-rooted problems come into views, which further intensify the fracture of the city. The cohesion of the society is under great challenge.

Moreover, the city seems to be enveloped in a shroud of animosity. Some people worry that the basic social values of the Hong Kong society are to be eroded, and the governance of the SAR Government, as well as the prospects of the Hong Kong society would be affected in the long run.

During the fifth term of the Hong Kong Special Administration Government chief executive election, the candidates coincidentally focused on connection, unity and back on track etc. in their election platforms, reflecting that the candidates and the society as a whole concerned about the importance of social cohesion and togetherness, with a hope that the new government could lead the society for a better future while bringing the spirit of help each other into full play.

Building social togetherness is not the work of one person but requires the cooperation of each member of the society. It is also not a one single day work but takes a long time for fulfilment. What do the young people think about social togetherness? At a point when the new government just started operation, this research is conducted in an attempt to explore what the society could do to strengthen its cohesion for a greater sense of togetherness.

In conducting this research, data were collected for analysis through a random sampling telephone survey from April to June 2017 of 529 young people aged 15 to 34. Four parallel discussion groups were conducted with a total of 17 young people in April and May. At the same time, interviews with four experts or academics were conducted.

Major Findings

- 1. 95% of respondents thought social togetherness in Hong Kong was important. The greatest meaning it has for Hong Kong is its potential to improve livelihoods, to keep the city moving on, or to increase people's sense of belonging.**

The results of the telephone survey showed that more than an overwhelming majority of 95.2% of respondents thought social togetherness in Hong Kong was important. For them, the greatest meaning social togetherness has for Hong Kong is its potential to improve livelihoods (27.6%), to keep the city moving on (27.4%), to increase people's sense to belonging (20.8%), to boost its competitiveness (11.9%), or to enhance governance efficiency (8.5%).

In respondents' views, some factors have obstructed social togetherness of HK society recently. The biggest obstacle is a lack of mutual trust between the citizens and the Government (33.0%). It is followed by the fact that the stakeholders are too keen of sticking to their positions (23.1%), or there witnesses a serious uneven allocation of social resources (21.2%).

Young participants in a parallel discussion group said that by strengthening social togetherness would increase their sense of identity as a Hong Kong citizen, with a belief that the Hong Kong citizens would work together to tackle the challenges facing Hong Kong.

- 2. Close to half considered the sense of belonging the most crucial element for social togetherness. Other important elements included trust, and rational communication.**

The survey results showed that 49.3% of respondents referred to the sense of belonging when asked about the crucial element for social togetherness. This is followed by the option of mutual trust among people (43.8%). The third came the rational communications among

people in the society (33.3%). Some 20% said it was the citizens having willingness to participate in social affairs (21.5%), or the society having common visions (19.2%).

Young participants in a parallel discussion group said that people should be tolerant of different views with empathy. This could help reduce producing confrontation.

Experts and academics in the interview believed that it was normal for people to have diverse views in any society. Respect and rationality are the premise for a society to build social togetherness in diversity.

3. 88% of respondents aspired for a society with social togetherness. Yet, they were not that optimistic when asked about the extent to which they believed Hong Kong could become such a society in 5 years.

The survey results showed that 88.3% of respondents wish Hong Kong could be a society with social togetherness & tolerance. On an individual level, more than half (56.8%) said that they would be tolerant of different views, for the sake of promoting togetherness of the society. Close to half (49.6%) said that they would take up their civic duty while helping developing the society. More than one-third (36.2%) would avoid making confrontation, while more than 30% would participate into social affairs (31.4%). More than one-tenth (11.3%) said they would take up posts in government's advisory bodies.

However, 57.1% were of the view that they didn't believe they have an ability to help promote social togetherness for the society as a whole. On a scale of 0-10 where indicating a very confident and 5 denoting a half-half, one-third (32.2%) of respondent rated at 5 points when asked to rate their confidence about HK could become a society with social togetherness in 5-year time. The average point was 4.2.

Young participants in a parallel discussion group voiced out the problems that hindered their capabilities in helping promote social togetherness. The problems mainly included the lack of resources and the relatively small representativeness of young people in the current

governance system. Some also pointed out the obstacles that impeded their confidence about the prospect of HK in reaching social togetherness. The obstacles mainly included the serious wealth-gap problem and the acute political confrontation.

4. Respondents have an impression that the society is in serious fracture in recent years. On a scale of 0-10 where 5 indicating a half-half, 3.35 was the average extent to which respondents felt the government had performed in facilitating social togetherness.

On a scale of 0-10 when 10 implying very serious and 5 denoting a half-half, respondents gave an average 7.30 points when asked to indicate the extent to which they felt the society was at serious risk of fracture in recent years. Having faced with the serious fracture of the society, 34.3% of respondents felt worrying. Some 22.6% felt sad for HK.

Moreover, on the same scale of 0-10 where 10 implying an excellent while 0 indicating very poor, 3.35 was the average extent to which respondents felt the government had performed in facilitating the social togetherness of HK society. The grading was obviously below 5, a half-half level.

A respective of 40% of respondent said that the government should include people with different backgrounds to the government (41.1%), or keep on development HK (39.8%), as a way to minimize fracturing of the society. Close to one-third (32.3%) said that the government should set up a regular communication mechanism with different parties. More than 20% said that restart the political reform (27.1%), or forming a vision for the city (21.1%) could be a way out.

Young participants in a parallel discussion group considered the following factors for the recent serious splitting up of the society. First, People have different expectations on the constitutional development of the city, which make it not easy to come up with consensus but politicization of social issues. Second, the deep-rooted social problems heap on the grievances of the citizens. Third, the widespread use of the internet makes it easy for the evil words or words with personal attack

to be spread out recklessly or irresponsibly.

- 5. Majority of the respondents were of the view that social togetherness was related to them. Respondents in a parallel discussion group thought that each member in the society had a role to play for building social togetherness.**

87.3% of respondents rejected the notion that “whether HK is having social togetherness or not is none of their business”. Young participants in a parallel discussion group thought that each member in the society had a responsibility to help build social togetherness. Experts and academics in the interview believed that social togetherness required the contribution and interaction of each sector in the society to keep on the momentum or atmosphere of nurturing the sense of social togetherness.

Main Discussions

- 1. Social together bring with concrete meaning, including keeping society moving on for a better prospect. Yet, it is not a one single day work while it could be easily spoiled. People should treasure it.**

Young people uphold the importance of social togetherness, and believe that it plays a concrete role for a society, such as keeping it moving on for a better prospect. Look around the development of various states, cities and some international organizations in the world, people continuously pay efforts on strengthening social cohesion and togetherness, indicating it is a long term work. It also implies that social cohesion and togetherness is something which would be easily ruined, and that is why continuous efforts are needed. There is no shortcut road for building social togetherness. We need to treasure what we have established for the foundation of social togetherness.

- 2. The main elements for social together are some basic social values, such as trust and tolerance. Yet, it is normal for any society to have diverse views. The crucial point is shielding these social values in diversity.**

Young people consider the sense of belonging, trust, rationality and etc. as the main elements for social togetherness. They also are aware of the importance of having equal opportunities to express views and be tolerant of different points of views. These are the premise for building social togetherness. All these are also the basic social values. However, with the development of society which becomes more diverse and complicated, rifts and conflicts seemed to be inevitable. This might obstruct the society from forming a strong base for social cohesion. It is worthy the society and all walks of life thinking in deep about shielding the social values in a diverse society.

- 3. Young people are looking forward to having a society with a greater sense of social cohesion. The society and the government should go to any length to provide them with opportunities as many as possible to reinforce their confidence and energy, and give full play of their roles in building togetherness of the society.**

Young people have aspirations of having a society with a greater sense of social cohesion, and most of them are willing to take actions on an individual level to realize this goal.

uphold the importance of social togetherness, and believe that it plays a concrete role for a society, such as keeping it moving on for a better prospect. Look around the development of various states, cities and some international organizations in the world, people continuously pay efforts on strengthening social cohesion and togetherness, indicating it is a long term work. It also implies that social cohesion and togetherness is something which would be easily ruined, and that is why continuous efforts are needed. There is no shortcut road for building social togetherness. We need to treasure what we have established for the foundation of social togetherness.

3. Increasing the transparency of the appointment process could help improve the public's trust in the officials.

In the young people's views, one of the biggest problems of the political appointment system lies in its poor transparency of the appointment process, while quite a considerable proportion of young people do not trust the principal officials. It seems that the so-called "appointment by merit" principle, which is always claimed by the government, has failed to earn the trust of the public. This could be negatively affecting the public's perceptions of the officials.

The HKSAR Government should do something to improve the transparency of the appointment process in an effort to, on the one hand, make the officials better-known to the public, and on the other hand strengthen the public's trust in the officials.

4. There has been an increasing demand for political talent. It is worth putting more effort into strengthening and developing the pool for political talent for Hong Kong's society.

The number of applications for the posts of Deputy Directors of Bureau and Assistants to Directors of Bureau has been increasing. On this foundation, the government should develop a mechanism to store and manage the talent database.

The political landscape of Hong Kong society is full of challenges, and it needs a group of talented people with enthusiasm and willingness to join the governance team. There is a pragmatic need for the society's various groups – such as tertiary institutes, political parties, civil service, think tanks, and so on – to open up platforms where future talent might be nurtured for the benefit of society as a whole.

5. The political appointment system is implemented without the parallel development of party politics. This is unfavourable to cultivating a governance team with a common agenda. This also intensifies the

problem of talent shortage to fill the political team.

One of the biggest challenges of the HKSAR Government's political appointment system lies in its lack of party politics. This could bring certain discouraging effects, such as hindering the cultivation of a governance team with a common agenda. The filling of political posts using party politics is also discouraged. The development of party politics in Hong Kong society is a concern.

- 6. The chief executive leads the governance team. The chief executive should exert his/ her charisma to get a group of people who are competent to run the government.**

Under the political appointment system, it is the chief executive who nominates people to the political team. It is also the chief executive who leads the governance team. Therefore, the chief executive plays a vital role regarding the operation of the political appointment system.

Yet, recently, the approval rating of the government continues to be poor, while the constitutional development of Hong Kong society is stagnating. Together with the fact that there have been controversies over policies in recent years, this might be affecting the public's perceptions of the legitimacy of the politically appointed officials nominated by the chief executive. Meanwhile, some people might find it an unattractive proposition to join the so-called hot kitchen.

The chief executive should exert his/ her charisma to get a group of people with competence to run the government.

Recommendations

This study proposes the following recommendations:

- 1. Expand the political appointment system to strengthen the nurturing of political talent.**

The study recommends expanding the political appointment system by creating low-ranking positions for the less experienced talent on the one hand, and on the other hand offering internship placement for university students to accumulate political skills and build their networks.

2. Establish a formal platform for the officials to share their visions.

The study recommends establishing a formal platform for the officials to share their visions early on when they first take office. This could make the officials better-known to the public, while narrowing the distance between the officials and the public.

3. Enhance direct communication between the officials and the public.

The study recommends that the officials make good use of all means available, both online and offline, of enhancing public opinion collections.

The officials should also take turns visiting secondary schools to have interactions with students, which can enhance mutual respect and mutual trust with young people.

4. Ensure the governance experience of the officials could be retained and passed on.

The governance experience of the politically appointed officials is precious. Drawing inspiration from overseas practice, the study recommends that the government to retain the governance experience of the former politically appointed officials by any means, as a reference for the further development of the system in future.