

## Executive Summary

A “Generation” refers to a group of people with collective characteristics, who were also born and/or are living within the same time period. The impact of rapid changes in politics, economics, societal and technology would result in the emergence of various cohorts, each with their own individual characteristics and features<sup>1</sup>. Intergenerational relationships are important as every society requires cooperation and interaction between respective generations.

Recent social events have triggered vigorous discussions, arguments and sometimes conflict between different generations in Hong Kong. The majority of protesters have been younger people who hold distinctly different values, views and political stances from their parents and other generations. As such strained intergenerational relationships within families at a micro level (i.e. between parents and their children) have not been uncommon recently.

The different generational views on social issues are generated by their different past cohort experiences<sup>2</sup>. These deep-rooted differences may trigger the controversy or conflict between generations. It is also not conducive to social stability and the younger generational would be unable to inherit the knowledge, culture and experience gained by previous generations. Therefore, positive and cohesive intergenerational relationships have an important meaning for social development.

Hong Kong sociologist, Professor Lui Tai-lok, defined Hong Kong’s different generations according to population development and social status<sup>3</sup>. Growing up within an era of material deprivation, the second generation of baby boomers born after World War II want stability above everything else. Conversely those born since the 1990s (in a period when Hong Kong has become more affluent and stable), consider social values and

---

<sup>1</sup> Zhou, X. H. (2008). Conflict and Self-identity: Intergenerational relationships under globalization. *Society*, 28(2), 20. (in Chinese)

<sup>2</sup> Kenton, W. (2019). Generation Gap Definition. Retrieved from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/generation-gap.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Lui Tai-lok. (2007). Hong Kong’s Four Generations. Hong Kong: Stepforward Multimedia. (in Chinese)

their way of life of greater importance than economic growth<sup>4</sup>. Due to the contrast between their sharply different social status, values, mind-sets and attitudes toward social issues and development, this research focused mainly on these two generations.

Encouraging communication and interaction between generations and offering possible solutions will, it is hoped, enhance their mutual understanding and appreciation. It would also be beneficial for future intergenerational relationships and social development.

This research was conducted between October and November 2019 and data was collected for analysis through a survey of: 300 young people (aged 18-29); 302 parents (aged 54-73); 20 young people participating in case interviews; and interviews with four experts or professionals.

## Main Discussion

### **1. Cohesive intergenerational relationships could ensure the life culture is transferred between generations. It is also beneficial for Hong Kong to remain a mature and progressive city.**

Strong and positive intergenerational relationships can maintain the transmission and exchange of capital, life skills, values, social norms, history and culture. It is also beneficial for maintaining social stability and development. More importantly, as a progressive city, multiple generations should be active in maintaining a civil society. Co-operation, interaction and inclusion between generations and the elimination of age discrimination are key factors in constructing a mature and progressive society.

Therefore, the government should implement various policies and measures to maintain positive relationships and interactions between generations. Those interactions maintain the transmission of culture and knowledge between generations, as well as making Hong Kong a mature and progressive city.

---

<sup>4</sup> Hong Kong Ideas Centre. (2013). *The Fifth Generation in Hong Kong: Confession of 1990s*. (in Chinese)

**2. Intergenerational conflicts and opposition have long occurred in Hong Kong; the younger generation faces greater pressures.**

Intergenerational conflicts have long occurred in Hong Kong society. In this survey, respondents from both target groups slightly agreed with the statement that “different generations in Hong Kong have an opposite relation to each other”. The average response value was 5.91 (on a scale of 1 to 10). In addition, 80.9% of respondents also agreed with the statement that “the younger generation faces greater pressure than the older generation in social competition”; 74.3% of respondents agreed “the younger generation has fewer opportunities for upward mobility than the older generation”.

Relatively speaking, due to the structural change of society, the younger generation faces a greater pressure than the older generation in Hong Kong. The government should continually understand the situation and mind-set of young people, bringing in relevant policies and measures to prevent conflict, thereby positively influencing intergenerational relationships.

**3. Recent social events have caused greater family conflicts. However, the older generation is more willing to understand the situation of the younger generation.**

There should be an inherent system of mutual-support among family members. However, this would break down due to poor communication or relationships between respective family members. More seriously, society may end up having to pay a higher cost for their mental health and wellness. As indicated in expert interviews, recent social incidents have triggered vigorous discussions, arguments, and even conflicts between generations. The existing tensions between parents and their children must be recognised and addressed by the government.

The conflicts have also created an opportunity for transformation with experts also mentioning that recent social incidents had also

helped to weaken the tension between generations. Most notably more of the older generation are beginning to consider the problems and situation faced by today's young people.

The family relationship is an important part of the overall intergenerational relationship within society, but this has been affected by recent events. In this context whereby both parents and their children were willing to improve their relationship, the relevant authorities should provide more family-support services. This could be in the form of providing emotional management and conflict mediation to enhance mutual support within families.

#### **4. The reasons affecting intergenerational relationships in Hong Kong:**

Integrating the findings of literature review, the on-site survey and interviews with youths and experts, the following are the main causes affecting intergenerational relationships in Hong Kong:

##### **a. Differences in cohort experience change the values of generations**

According to the literature, difference in cohort experience is the main cause of intergenerational conflict. Every era has its own opportunities, values and standard of life. These shape individuals, the paths that they take and their attitudes towards society. In the on-site survey, 71.3% of respondents also believed that difference in values was the main reason for intergenerational conflict. However, 53.7% and 51.7% of the respondents believed it was differences in growing experiences and educational level or knowledge.

##### **b. The simplification of political and economic structures**

The Experts also indicated that the simplification of the political and economic structure in Hong Kong is also a factor. The inequality intensified by globalization and poor governance, the younger generation has long-been neglected and lacks confidence

in their future livelihood due to an imbalanced economic development. For this reason, the younger generation hopes to break the current economic structure that has been dominated by the older generation in an attempt to impose a new economic order. Therefore, all of these add to the competitive and adversarial relationship between generations.

**c. Social Media has triggered intergenerational conflicts**

According to the experts in interviews, the emergence of social media and networks has helped to trigger intergenerational conflict by changing the world's concept of the younger generation. Without Social Media, the concept of hierarchy would still persist in society. Ideas and opinions formed at lower levels in society would be difficult to pass to higher levels. However, individuals have become equal with the emergence of Social Media. The original social order and political structure between generations has been broken, triggering the conflicts.

**d. Differences in the sense of identity**

Another reason for intergenerational conflicts and variation is the sense of identity. The experts believed that the older generation generally and naturally recognized their identity as Chinese. However, the sense of identity for Hong Kong's younger generation requires thorough reconstruction: while growing up, there have been many distinctions between the Mainland and Hong Kong. In addition, their sense of identity also tends to be diverse. They could recognise themselves as a "Global Citizen"; "Hongkonger in China" or a "Hongkonger".

**5. Resolving the problems of economic and resource allocation could only relieve part of the conflict. Most importantly, institutions and the political system should be addressed directly.**

In the on-site survey, more respondents believed that the differences in value orientation (71.3%), growing experiences (53.7%) and educational level or knowledge (51.7%) were the main

reasons for intergenerational conflicts. However, experts believed that deep-rooted problems are not about resource allocation and financial uncertainty. Instead, the political system is the uppermost issue to address.

Overall, resolving the problems of economic and resource allocation, could only partly relieve the intergenerational conflicts and contradictions. In order to address the deep-rooted problems and the young people's demands, the government have to increase the degree of transparency in the political system and encourage more young people to participate in the policy-making process.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed in this study:

**1. Improving the intergenerational relationship starts from the family perspective and the parent-child relationship.**

a. The government should allocate more resources to family support services to enhance the parents' and young people's ability to handle conflicts within the family environment.

b. To relieve and address the situation within families, this study encourages parents and young people to seek professional assistance, such as family-mediation services, when experiencing family conflict.

c. This research also suggests starting a movement for positive family communication. In this movement, parents and youth from schools and communities would learn the skills of positive communication, emotional management and psychological first aid. They could, at community level also serve as ambassadors and share the skills acquired to better promote improved family relationships.

**2. Encouraging mentorship and intergenerational-friendly schemes and measures in the workplace in order to increase contact between generations.**

The government should encourage mentorship schemes in different industries, so that the younger generation could learn from older generations. It could also enhance mutual understanding to reduce the competition and friction between generations. These schemes could also help transmit the intangible cultural heritage of Hong Kong through activities such as Cantonese Opera and Hakka Unicorn Dance. Enterprises and corporations should provide more intergenerational measures and activities in the workplace to increase contact between generations and improve their understanding of each other.

**3. To better improve intergenerational relationships at the community level, District Councils should organize regular dialogues and serve as a bridge between different generations at the community.**

This research suggests the District Councils should organize and invite government officials to attend regular community dialogues. The government could then listen to public opinion, enabling different generations to have opportunities to communicate their views. In addition to the community meetings, District Councillors could also serve as a bridge connecting different generations within the community e.g. each generation group could share their stories via a “Living Library”. The younger generation would then have the opportunity to understand the past experiences and history of older generations. This can shorten the distance between different generations and improve their relationship.

**4. Fostering a supportive environment for intergenerational understanding from the government perspective.**

- a. The government should balance the need of different generations by reviewing relevant policies, while increasing the degree of transparency in the political system and encouraging more young people to participate in the policy-making process.**

The government should review current policies to achieve a balance between different generations: housing; community development; employment and social welfare. To resolve intergenerational conflicts, in the future, the government should also balance the views of different stakeholders when formulating new policies and allocating resources especially in respect of the needs of young people. In order to achieve the balance of different generations, the government should also increase the degree of transparency in the political system and encourage more young people to participate in the policy-making process.

- b. Establishing a dedicated fund encouraging local organizations to improve intergenerational relationships.**

This research suggests the government establishes a dedicated fund to encourage local organizations to utilize their own advantages and strengths in producing movies, video-clips or exhibitions that are aimed at promoting intergenerational relations. It is hoped that these soft measures could enhance the public understanding of the importance of good intergenerational relationships for social development.