



Title	Religion and Social Welfare in Hong Kong : An Overview
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Citation	研究論集, 14, 249(左)-266(左)
Issue Date	2014-12-20
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/57709
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	14_021_Ng.pdf



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Religion and Social Welfare in Hong Kong:

An Overview

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Introduction

Religious groups in Hong Kong have long played an important role in social welfare. A large amount of education, medical care, and social services are provided to the general public by Christian, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and folk religious organizations. While it is estimated that over 90% of social services in Hong Kong are run by NGO/NPOs (The Hong Kong Council of Social Services), religious groups make up approximately 70% of such services.¹ How has religion become an important contributor in the social welfare system of Hong Kong? What is the historical context that gave rise to this? And what are the differences in social services provided by various religious groups in terms of quantity and types? This paper attempts to answer these questions by reviewing the role of religious groups in Hong Kong's social welfare development and the social services they offer from the perspective of organizational integrity and state-religion relation.

Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong and the Role of Religion

During the early colonial period of Hong Kong, social welfare and charity were mainly provided by religious groups and local Chinese philanthropists. The role of the government in delivering social services was passive and minimal because of the lack of financial

¹ Christian groups offer 70% of the total social services in Hong Kong. Adding Buddhism, Taoism, and other religious groups into the calculation, social services offered by religious groups in Hong Kong could be over 70%.

resources. With the establishment of the Chinese Communist regime in 1949 and the social unrests that followed, huge waves of migrants poured into Hong Kong. Population has surged from 600,000 in 1945 to 2,000,000 in 1950 (Chan and Leung 2003: 24). A rapid growth in population led to serious problems with food, housing, hygiene, medicine, education, and employment etc. The government set up the Social Welfare Office in 1947 to provide public services such as free meals, clothing, and placement of children in free schools (Hong Kong Government, 1952: 111). However, the development of a more comprehensive and quality welfare system was slow because of the rapid increase in population and the resultant lack of resources to tackle the problem (Hong Kong Government, 1973). In view of this, religious and secular welfare organizations stepped up work in meeting the needs of the destitute. A number of international organizations, many of them are Christian groups, also launched emergency relief campaigns to provide basic living necessities to people in need. Moreover, because of the acute need for welfare and education in 1950s and 60s, the government also cooperated with religious groups in building up schools and hospitals. The government financed new institutions, while religious groups were offered management and personnel resources for maintaining these institutions (Kwong 2000: 50).

In the late 1950s, the economic condition of Hong Kong improved steadily. However, the gap between the rich and the poor tended to grow larger. Rapid modernization and economic growth has broken down the traditional, informal network that emphasized mutual supports within neighborhood and community. People who were not able to benefit from the prosperity of the greater society needed to be cared for either by their family members or by society. In 1965, the colonial government officially started its effort in the expansion of social welfare by publishing its first White Paper on Social Welfare. However, the tone of the Paper is still conservative in nature, which just reiterated the responsibility for the government to only take care of the poor and promote the role of family, community, and volunteer groups in social welfare. The Paper also states that “the value of volunteer organizations was to attract more local and overseas funding in promoting social services in Hong Kong” and therefore Chow criticized that volunteer groups are treated by the government only as a means to reduce public funding for social welfare (Chan 2002: 357).

Following the Kowloon Riots² in 1966, the government began to confront the problem

² The Hong Kong 1966 Riots was a series of disturbances that took place over three nights on the streets

of poverty and unemployment seriously by reviewing its social welfare policies. In the 1970s, the government issued the second White Paper “Social Welfare into the 1980s” and the policy plan “The Five Year Plan for Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong 1973–1978”. In the two documents, the government recognized the contributions of NGO/NPOs (including religious groups) in promoting social welfare and promised to offer financial assistance to these groups in operating social services. In the early 1980s, a working group submitted the “Report on Provision of Social Welfare Services and Subvention Administration” to the government. One of the main ideas in the report suggested the government offer full funding to cover the personnel and administration cost of charitable organizations engaged in social services (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 1980). The suggestion was later accepted by the government. Since then, volunteer organizations have developed a partnership or a so-called “contractor-relationship” with the government in which the former run social services using public funds (Chan 2002: 360). In this way, government’s new approach to sponsoring social services has facilitated the social establishment of religious groups and further enhanced their role as social welfare provider in Hong Kong society.

Descriptive Analysis: Social Services Provided by Different Religions

A conservative approach to social welfare adopted by the government and the subsequent “contractor-relationship” established with volunteer organizations constituted a historical context under which religious groups had realized their responsibility in expanding social services for the public. This part discusses the establishment of social and charitable welfare by Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and folk religious group San Jiao in more details.

1. Christianity

Christian organizations have already played an active role in charity and social welfare during the early colonial period. Since the late 19th century, overseas Catholic and Protestant groups have established orphanages, hospital, schools, and child welfare centers in Hong Kong (Chan 2002; Lee 2012). To facilitate cooperation among different

of Kowloon, Hong Kong in the spring of 1966. The riots started as peaceful demonstrations against the British Colonial government’s decision to increase the fare of Star Ferry foot-passenger harbour crossing by 25 percent.

churches, the Social Service Centre of the Churches was established in 1936 to coordinate the efforts of different service groups. During the 1950s to 60s, many overseas Christian organizations established social welfare in Hong Kong to help relief the problems associated with rapid population growth. These organizations include The World Council of Churches' Migration Unit Hong Kong (1957), the Hong Kong Christian Welfare and Relief Council (1952), and The Lutheran World Service Hong Kong (1952), and Methodist Overseas Mission (1953), and the American Friends Lei Cheng Uk Friendly Centre (1955) (HKCS 2014). Apart from emergency relief work, Christian groups also started to try out various types of social services with funding from international organizations and overseas churches. They included the establishment of youth centers that offer vocational training, students' canteen that offer meals with low price, elderly center, and childcare center etc. In the 1960s, Bishop Ronald Hall and Rev. Karl K Stumpf, the most representative Church leaders at that time, actively promoted social services to serve the ordinary people by building Church service centers and schools in local communities. Sufficient human and financial resources and experience obtained in this period set a solid foundation for the Church to develop huge social service later on.

In 1981, a compromise was reached between the government and the leaders of Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, and the Hong Kong Christian Council. This meant that the government would give these organizations special consideration in their applications for the establishment of new churches, provided that each such church would operate one of the social services. They were permitted to organize religious activities in the venues they used for the social services, insofar as such activities did not come in conflict with the implementation of the prescribed social services. This also explains why social services, such as education, elder care, and young center in Hong Kong are usually operated by Church groups. Nowadays, Protestant and Catholic Church operate approximately 70% of all social services in Hong Kong.

Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong was established as a mission prefecture in 1841 and became a diocese in 1946. It was estimated that the Diocese of Hong Kong, amongst the local residents, has a membership of 374,000 as of 2013, who are served by 303 priests, 69 brother and 491 sisters.³ Regardless of the fact that it only occupies about

³ There are 51 parishes, comprising 40 churches, 31 chapels and 26 halls for religious services conducted

5% of the total population, the social services it has provided is very significant in supporting the welfare system of Hong Kong society.

According to official statistics, the Catholic Church operates a total of 264 schools (31 Kindergarten, 107 Primary, 85 Secondary & Middle, 2 Vocational, 30 Adult Education, 7 Special Schools, 2 Post-Secondary Schools), of which 98 are run by the Diocese, 49 by its social welfare unit Caritas⁴, 46 by Men congregations, 67 by Women congregations, 4 by the Laity. The total number of students attending Catholic schools is 165,781,⁵ of which 16,096 are Catholic (9.71%).

The Catholic Church has also operated a large amount of social and charitable welfare with its welfare unit Caritas, such as Social and Family service centres, hospital, and clinics (Table 1).

Table 1 Social and Charitable Welfare offered by the Catholic Church HK

Main Caritas Social & Family Service Centres (234,552 people cared for)	41
Hospital (in-patients Dept.: 2,745 beds, 234,542 patients)	6
Clinics & Hospital Out-patients Dept. (1,535,261 patients)	13
Nursery & Child Care Centres (1,054 boys, 1,104 girls)	16
Residential Homes for Girls (427 Residents)	7
Residential Homes for the Aged (1,639 Residents)	14
Centres for the Youth (772,576 people cared for)	23
Centres for the Elderly (30,234 people cared for)	16
Home Care Service (2,778 people)	13
Rehabilitation Service Centres (6,942 people cared for)	27
Hostels & Lodges (220,802 Boarders)	20
Camp Service (356 Beds, 50,612 residents)	5

Source: Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Homepage

Caritas Hong Kong (Caritas) was founded in 1953 by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. It aims to offer relief and rehabilitation services to the poor and the distressed, resulting from the Second World War and subsequent social and political changes in

in Cantonese; three-fifths of the parishes also provide services in English or other languages.

⁴ Caritas — Hong Kong is the official social welfare arm of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. These services are offered to everyone and, indeed, 95 per cent of those who have benefited from them are not Catholics.

⁵ 10,576 in Kindergarten, 67,225 in Primary Schools, 70,977 in Secondary & Middle Schools, 204 in Vocational Schools, 14,669 in Adult Education, 592 in Special Schools, 1,538 in Post-Secondary.

Hong Kong and Mainland China. Caritas has developed different services in response to Hong Kong's changing needs which include social work services, education, medical care, community development and hospitality (Caritas Homepage). Nowadays, Caritas operates 300 service units from about 150 locations with 5,500 full time staff and receives ongoing support from over 10,000 volunteers. The annual budget for recurrent expenditure exceeds HK\$ 1.5 billion (Caritas Homepage). While Caritas replies partly on Government's funding for some of the services, it largely relies on the fees and subsidies from participants and user of such the services, and on the donations and fund-raising campaigns throughout the territory and the Community Chest.⁶

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, an affiliation of the Catholic Church, has also been actively promoting democratic development, human rights, social security, medical service, housing, social welfare and labour policy.⁷

Protestant Church

Protestant missionary in Hong Kong coincided with the British colonial presence. Foreign missionary bodies arrived in Hong Kong since 1842.⁸ The influx of Protestant missionaries to Hong Kong came following the eradication of religions in Mainland in the late 1940s with the establishment of the communist regime. By promoting the spirit of Christianity and social services to the public, Protestant churches enjoyed rapid growth in the 1950s and 60s. With the decrease in number of refugees in the 70s, its growth began to level off. According to the latest survey conducted by the Hong Kong Church Renewal Movement in 2009, the number of baptized Christian is 478,803, which is about 7% of Hong Kong's total population. The Protestant community is composed of more than 50 denominations, 1,400 congregations, 30 theological seminaries/Bible schools, and at least 250 Christian organizations (Irons and Melton 2008: 39-41).

Most of the mainline denominations have branches here, such as the Baptist, Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals. There are many indigenous

⁶ The Community Chest serves as an umbrella organization to provide grants to a wide range of community projects.

⁷ The Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, http://www.hkjp.org/about_en.php?id=3

⁸ Examples include the American Baptist missionary in 1842, London Missionary Society in 1843, Anglican Church in 1843; American Board, American Lutherans, as well as and German churches also sent missionaries to Hong Kong during the late 19th century (Kwong 2000: 52).

denominations such as the Church of Christ in China, and the True Jesus Church etc. The two major ecumenical bodies are the Hong Kong Christian Council (established in 1954) and the Hong Kong Chinese Christian Church Union (established in 1915). They conduct a wide variety of programs and services to serve the community. In particular, The Hong Kong Christian Council responds to issues related to justice, peace, human rights, freedom, livelihood, and other needs of the community by giving its opinion and feedback to the government, such as on constitutional development, the policy address of Chief Executive, financial budget and racial discrimination bill. The Committee also initiates, participates in and promotes activities concerning society and livelihood of the community, e.g. the issues of globalization, Universal Retirement Protection (HKCC Homepage).

In brief, the Protestant community operates more than 630 schools (Kindergarten, primary, and secondary)⁹, three post-secondary institutions, five hospital, more than 200 social service centers, and a range of charitable institutions (Chan 2008: 39–41).

2. Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced into Hong Kong in the Wei dynasty (386–534). The earliest temple was established in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long around 428 CE by a Zen Buddhist monk *Beidu*. Later, Buddhist missions continued to expand in Hong Kong, of which the two major schools are Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism. Before the 20s century, Hong Kong Buddhists have not formed any strong organizations. Following the mission work of another monk Tai Xu in 1920, stronger Buddhist organizations were formed and many people were converted to Buddhism. In 1940, there were over one hundred temples or worship centers, serving 100,000 members. In 1945, after the World War II, local Buddhist masters came together to form the Buddhist Association of Hong Kong in a four-storey timber building in Wan Chai donated by a Japanese monk. In post-war Hong Kong, there were a large number of orphans who needed to be looked after and educated. The Buddhist Association set up the Charitable Chinese Buddhist

⁹ According to *Secondary School Profile 2012–2013*, among the 454 secondary schools in Hong Kong, there are 234 (51.5%) sponsored by Christian organizations (Catholic 88 and Protestant 146). Buddhism (21, i.e., 4.6%) and Taoism (6, i.e., 1%) are remarkably minor sponsors of secondary education. Similarly, *Primary School Profile 2012–2013* reveals that among the 516 primary schools, 284 (55%) are of Christian background. Buddhist and Taoist schools account for 3% and 1.5% respectively. This structure is not likely to change in the near future.

School to offer free education. More schools were opened later on with government funding. In the 1970s, their social engagement were expanded to medical services and youth recreation services. And in 1990s, more resources were devoted to elderly services.

Today, the Hong Kong Buddhist Association (HKBA) is the largest Buddhist group and umbrella body over all individual monasteries and believer's group in Hong Kong with a total membership over 10,000 comprising bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas and upasikas. Other surveys show the percentage of Buddhists increased from 6.6% on 1988 to 11.6% in 1995 (Cheng and Wong 1997: 310). Government's statistics suggest there are 800,000 Buddhist believers in Hong Kong, about 10% of Hong Kong's population (HK factsheets 2013).

Nowadays, the Association operates a range of social services, which include hospital, schools, elderly services, youth services, childcare services, cemeteries and magazines (HKBA Homepage). According to official sources, the Association runs the Hong Kong Buddhist Hospital with a capacity of 285 beds, 13 secondary schools and 8 primary schools with Government subsidy, as well as 7 kindergartens are run on a non-profit-making basis. In addition, the Buddhists community and individual believers in Hong Kong have, in total, operated 25 secondary schools, 21 primary schools and 11 kindergartens. In the 2010s, Buddhist Association started to promote Chinese medical services by establishing 3 clinics. It also operates a day nursery that can accommodate 112 children aged 2 to 6. The Association's Buddhist Youth Fellowship has over 20,000 members and organizes healthy activities including sports competitions and quiz contests on knowledge of Buddhism etc. Their Buddhist Youth Camp and Children and Youth Centre also provides a range of educational and cultural activities for young people aged 6 to 25. In terms of elderly services, the Association runs a Government subverted Care & Attention Home for the Elderly with a capacity of 276 places, three Neighbourhood Elderly Centres, and one Cultural and Services Centre for the Elderly to provide community support services for elders. Members of the Association's Women and Charity Welfare Committee also arrange annual visits to old people's homes in Chinese New Year (HKBA Homepage).

3. Taoism

It is argued that Taoism in Hong Kong maybe roughly divided in three types (Lai 2011: 357-359). The first one refers to private worship centres, most of them are offshoots of Taoist centers in the Pearl River Delta and Guangdong area. Many of them became

charitable organizations affiliated to the Hong Kong Taoist Association (HKTA). The second one is composed of professional Taoists who belong to the Orthodox school. They either form some small worship center or choose to practice as individuals. The third one refers to regional or communal Taoist temples that are owned by villages in the New Territories of Hong Kong or by the government.

In 1990s, there were over 300 registered Taoist temples in Hong Kong that are privately owned, administered by a religious group or regional community, or controlled by government. With the establishment of the Hong Kong Taoist Association in 1961, some of these independent temples were coordinated under an umbrella body. Nowadays, the Association has around 100 registered temples (HKTA Homepage). The total number of Taoist practitioners is around server tens of thousands (Irons and Melton 2008: 125).

Taoist groups are involved in educational, medical and relief work. For instance, the HKTA operates 5 secondary school, 5 primary schools, and 6 kindergartens in Hong Kong to promote “Taoist education” to around 14,000 students. The Youth Fellowship of HKTA has also engaged in volunteer activities, such as visiting centers for the mentally handicapped and organizing festival and party for the elderly (HKTA Homepage).

4. Confucianism

Although it is argued that Confucianism exists in Hong Kong mainly as a philosophical tradition, a moral system, and barely exist as an institutional religion in Hong Kong, there are 4 groups that aim at promoting Confucius ideas to society, which are *Kong Sheng Hui* (Confucian Sage Association), *Zhonghua Shengjiao Zonghui* (Chinese Sage Teaching Association), the Confucius Hall, and the Confucian Academy. Most of their groups are composed of businessmen. The Confucian Academy is the most active organization among the four. It was established in 1930 with an objective to spread Confucian teachings, education, and “counterbalance the colonial acculturation programs” (Kwong 2000). The association has operated 2 secondary and 2 primary schools, which uphold the Confucian teaching of “Left No Child Behind” to cultivate the talents of all children.

5. San Jiao

A major characteristic of Chinese religiosity is its syncretic nature. Popular religions borrow from other existing traditions for their doctrines, rituals, or even food, dress, and

language. One of such syncretic religions that is popular in Hong Kong is Sao Jiao, a amalgamation of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Although this religion venerated the gods and follow the teachings of these three traditions, it is regarded as a member of Taoism and registered under the Hong Kong Taoist Association, partly for the sake of convenience. In fact, the social services provided by San Jiao organizations, such as Sik Sik Yuen and Yuen Yuen Institute is comparable to other mainline religious groups.

In 1915, Taoist priests from Guangdong Province brought with them a portrait of the Taoist God, Master Wong Tai Sin to Hong Kong. A small shrine was set up on Hong Kong Island to worship the god. In 1921, a new shrine was build near Kowloon City after obtaining divine revelation from Wong Tai Sin, and the managing body Sik Sik Yuen was established to run the shrine. The Temple, used to be a private shrine, was opened to the public in 1956 after it formally applied to the government. To facilitate administration and management, Sik Sik Yuen registered itself as a limited company of charitable nature in 1965.

As a charitable organization Sik Sik Yuen has made much contribution in the fields of medical, education, elderly and child care services. In 1961, it set up a Schools Planning Committee and actively applied to the government for establishing new school. Nowadays, Sik Sik Yuen is operating 4 secondary schools, 3 primary schools, 1 through-train primary & secondary school, 6 kindergartens/child care centre and 1 nature education cum astronomical centre, with over 10,000 students and more than 800 staff.

Based on the idea of “caring for the senior citizen”, Sik Sik Yuen has actively developed elderly services aiming at helping the seniors to lead a more prosperous life. The organizations now operates 5 Homes for the Elderly, 8 Neighbourhood Centres for Senior Citizens, 1 Social Centres for Senior Citizens, 1 Health Care Services Centre, and 2 District Community Centres for Senior Citizens.

Since 1924, the Herbal Clinic has been offering free consultations and medications to the needy. In 1980, the Yuen established a medical block to provide Chinese medical services. Dental Clinic and Physiotherapy Centre were also opened to provide more diversified medical services for the general public. In 2009, Sik Sik Yuen and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University collaborate to operate an optometry centre.

Yuen Yuen Institute (YYI) also represents the efforts of San Jiao in promoting social services. It was established in 1950 by monks from Sanyuan Gong in Tsuen Wan District in the New Territories, its area is interspersed with temples, pavilions, and monasteries dedicated to Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. In 1956, the Institute

formally registered to the government as a charitable organization. The objective of the organization is to spread the teachings of the three religions and to promote social welfare. Nowadays, the Institutes operate 3 secondary schools, 1 primary school, and 5 kindergartens (YYI Homepage). Since 1974, it started to provide elderly services through its 2 elderly homes, day care center, and 2 elderly centres. It also runs a clinical centre to offer medical services to the public.

Comparison: From the Perspective of Organizational Integrity and State-society Synergy

The history of the social services offered by different religious groups is reviewed in the previous section. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Different Services offered by religious groups in HK

	Christianity	Buddhism	Taoism	Confucianism	San Jiao
Main social services providers	Catholic, Protestant Church/groups	Hong Kong Buddhist Association	Hong Kong Taoist Association	Confucian Academy	Sik Sik Yuen, Yuen Yuen Institute
Education	897 schools	28 schools	16 schools	4 schools	24 schools
Medicine	24 hospitals or clinics	4 hospital or clinics			1 clinic
Social Service (family, elderly, youth)	323 centers	6 centers			22 centers

This part attempts to compare the scale and development of their social services from the perspective of organizational integrity and state-society synergy. The two concepts were formulated by Michael Woolcock in his studies of social capital, based on previous studies on ethnic entrepreneurship and comparative institutionalism. According to Woolcock (1998: 168-70), *state-society synergy* refers to “ties that connect citizens and public officials across the public-private divide” as well as social relationships between representatives of formal organizations. *Organizational integrity* consists of two key organizational dimensions: the internal structures that establish and perpetuate capacity and credibility, and the external ties to clients and constituents. It is commonly identified that these two forces are important for the development of organizations. Borrowing these concepts, Chan (2001) studied how Sik Sik Yuen has achieved both

organizational integrity and state-society synergy that facilitated its establishment in Hong Kong. Following his approach, this part discusses how these two factors might have affected the role various religious groups have played in social services. In other words, their degree of establishment in social services varies because they have achieved different level of organizational integrity and state-society synergy in the social and historical context of Hong Kong.

Organizational integrity

Organizational integrity is the study of institutional coherence, competence, and capacity (Woolcock 1998: 168). It is usually related to elements such as structures, objectives, and resources of an organization. Christian organizations have a relatively stronger structure than other groups because of their longer history of development in Hong Kong or overseas, particularly in relation to social welfare. Many of them came to Hong Kong and developed branches in the early colonial period, experiencing a considerably longer period of indigenization and formation of organizational structure. One features of many Christian churches is that they have set up various units or divisions to promote social services. For example, Caritas was specifically established in 1953 as the social welfare unit of Catholic Church, which is further divided into smaller, specific task forces to operate and administrate different services in education, elderly support, and medical and care services etc. Another feature is the formation of Christian ecumenical bodies, such as Hong Kong Christian Council and Hong Kong Christian Services, to coordinate efforts of different denominations. They conduct policy research and action plan to advice church members to work for a common goal. Such body was formed as early as in the beginning of 20th century, such as the Social Service Centre of the Churches, which was established in 1936 to coordinate the efforts of different service groups and to provide family service and material assistance to people in need. The Centre is further developed into the Hong Kong Council of Social service in 1947, which has become an essential partner of the Hong Kong Government in social welfare and development.¹⁰ On the contrary, Chinese religions are less developed in organizational structure, or their history of compartmentalization and division of labor and function is

¹⁰ The Council represents more than 400 Agency Members, providing over 90% of the social welfare service through their 3,000 operating units in Hong Kong. http://www.hkcss.org.hk/e/fc_detail1.asp?fc_id=15

comparatively short, which may have affected their capacity in expanding social services. For instance, it is only until 1985 that Sik Sik Yuen established the five working groups to manage its involvement in education, medical, and social services (Chan 2001). Besides, while Taoist and Buddhist temples may participate in their respective umbrella bodies (Taoist Association and Buddhist Association) and cooperate in social services, coordinated efforts among temple members are not as strong as that found in Christian ecumenical bodies. It maybe related to the traditions that operation of temples tends to be more independent in nature. The formation of an umbrella body is more of management and administrative considerations, as well as to portrait to government and society the modernized image of their religions, so as to attract more public attention, funding, and donations. Coordinated efforts among temples in working out plans and actions for social services are less common.

Besides, Christian groups generally have a clearer objective in their development. There has been a long-standing theological debate over the relationships between missionary work and the value of social welfare among Hong Kong Church leaders and scholars. Three modes of relationships are central to the debate. The first one adopts a consequentialist standpoint. They believe if the gospel of God is promoted successfully, mutual support and love will be established in society. In such an ideal world, mankind will help each other spontaneously and there is no need of public social welfare system. It therefore holds that the church should focus their effort on mission but not on social welfare. The second idea concerns social welfare as a *means* of missionary work and is mainly supported by the Fundamentals and Evangelicals. It holds that social welfare is just a means to achieve the ultimate goal of mission. In other words, while social welfare may have its value in society, in the eyes of some church groups, it is mainly to serve the purpose of promoting the gospel. The third opinion perceives social welfare as a *partner* of mission. Supporters of this view believe that taking social responsibility (concern for those living in poverty and a commitment to pursuing justice) and promoting gospel of god are parts of the Integral Mission. In the “Cape Town Commitment” in 2010, it is further made clear that “individual persons”, “society”, and “creation” are all included in the mission of God and must be “part of the comprehensive mission of God’s people.” Following this idea, promoting the betterment of society through social welfare is also perceived as achieving God’s mission. While different denominations may adopt a model that best suits their religious doctrines and biblical understandings, the mainstream churches in Hong Kong have tended to recognize the

positive values of social welfare in their missionary work, either as a means to promote Christianity (mode 2) or as part of the “mission of God” (mode 3). Based on such theological considerations, the idea of “holistic mission” that emphasizes conducting social and charitable works in accordance with the spread of god’s gospel is usually solid in the founding principles of churches and consistent throughout their development. This socially engaging character has also helped Christian churches develop a positive image among the public, enhancing their legitimacy in social engagement and a “sense of serving the people” in outlining welfare policies.

In fact, Chinese religious teachings are also strongly related to the promotion of social goods. For example, Buddhist doctrines promote *bu-shi* and *ci-bei*, meaning donations/giving, and companionate/love, while Taoist groups have a long history of promoting a better society through charity and relief work (Lai 352). Yet, it is argued that many Chinese religious groups tend to be more traditional, and relatively more oriented to promoting their religious traditions through cultural and religious activities. As a result of such character, the services they provide are less varied when compared to Christian groups. It is also partly due to their comparatively less experience in conducting a larger range of services, at least during the early period of their organizations. In the course of development, however, these religious groups may obtain more experience and resources to operate more social services, and further realize their religious ideals through social engagement.

Christian churches devote comparatively more time and resources on social services, which is also attributed to their large amount of human and financial assets overseas and accumulated locally. It enables churches to mobilize their resources into various social services in a more flexible style. While Chinese religious groups have also received much financial support from the local community and government, overseas resources are less sound compared to Christian groups. The contractor-relationships established between the government and volunteer organizations further stabilized the financial sources for religious groups to carry out services. Related to the first two factors, however, Chinese religious groups were less active and less successful in proposing their social services to the government and thereby receiving less funding in their social services establishment. This situation has changed gradually in the late 20th century when Chinese religious groups are becoming more successful in attracting more financial supports from local elites.

State-society synergy

When talking about state-religion relations, Yang (2012) suggests that four forms of restrictive regulation can be identified which are *eradication of all religion* (e.g., Albania and China under the radical Communists), *religious monopoly* (e.g. medieval Europe), *religious oligopoly* (in which several religions are sanctioned whereas others are suppressed), and a *free market* (in which no religion is singled out for subsidies or suppression). The last form of regulations “free market” does not mean there is no policies regulating the operation of religions but those regulations remain at a minimal administrative level. Borrowing Yang’s typology, religion in Hong Kong appears to be a *free market*. The policies or philosophies, upheld by the two governments, *in its ideal form*, protect religious freedom and ensure fair competition among religious groups. However, *in practice*, educational and cultural policies might have positive or negative effects on the development of some religions but not the others. Particular religious groups were privileged through administratively means in some aspects. It is because Britain was a Christian country and the Church of England had a significant role to play in social and political affairs in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the Anglican Church in Hong Kong did share similar rights in the colony. Even though Christianity has never been enjoying full monopoly on the religious market of Hong Kong, Christian churches including Roman Catholics were given important privileges and greater shares of social resources than other religions. This includes, according to Kwong, privileges of education and social services, marriage ceremonies, leadership of ceremonies in certain national functions, and with seats in the legislature council (2002, 57).

Under this historical and political context, Christian churches have enjoyed better state-society relations in terms of their closer ties with government officials and a stronger reputation among the public. For instance, a compromise was reached between the government and the leaders of various church leaders in 1981 to grant them special consideration in their applications for the establishment of new churches and social services. This allows churches and government to synergize their effort in establishing social welfare.

In terms of education, Carl’s studies on the early development of Christianity in Hong Kong found that as early as 1845 the British colonial government had appointed priests and missionaries to be counselors of educational affairs and education inspectors working out policies to promote and manage education development in Hong Kong (1985). In the late 19th century, William Lobscheid from Chinese Evangelization soci-

ety, E. J. Eitel, a former missionary, and Sir John Bowring from Unitarian Church, were appointed School Inspectors, further consolidating the influence of Christianity on education. School facilities, such as school halls, classrooms, or even playgrounds could become fully utilized as religious facilities for masses and worships on weekends for the promotion of Christianity. Besides, in most Christian schools, not only Bible Studies were mandatory, students were also required to attend worship and taught to pray and follow the teachings of Christ. Clergies usually enjoyed more power than school principals. And these schools in turn preferred hiring teachers and staff that were also Christians. In the 1960s, the government has adopted a more lenient policy towards other non-Christian religions and invited organizations of various religious traditions to join partnerships as government's re-distributors in the provision of education and social services in Hong Kong. But the vested interests Church has enjoyed would not be easily redistributed to other religious groups unless drastic changes in educational policy are implemented.

In addition, Christianity also has an important role in the cultural activities of Hong Kong people. A look at the legal holiday of Hong Kong reflects the privileges enjoyed by Christianity before 1997. During Colonial rule, religious festivals originated from Christianity including Easter (3 days) and Christmas (2 days) were included in the legal holiday. Easter, Christmas, and Valentines' Day are widely promoted and celebrated as important occasion. No other holidays were associated with any other religion. Some religious leaders see this as a form of unfair treatment. For instance, Venerable Kwok Kok, the Chairman of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association writes:

While the foreign beliefs were entitled to a lot of festive activities, the birthday of the Buddha did not even get enough respect to be marked as a public holiday. It is a clear indicator of the unfair treatment under colonialism (Kok 1997; quoted in Kwong 2000: 140).

Similarly, Du Zuyi (1997: 31), Professor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, criticizes in a Taoist publication *Jiuqi Nian De Wenjiao Fangan* (Proposal for cultural development of 1997) that colonialism has shown favoritism towards foreign beliefs in areas of politics, education, fiancé, and the use of language.

Another perspective to view the close relations between government and Christianity is that Christianity prevails in the area of politics as seen from the large amount of

self-proclaiming Christian inside the cabinet and government bureaucracy. In the last cabinet, there were ten Christian out of fifteen members. Mr Donald Tsang, the previous Chief Executive of Hong Kong, is also a Christian himself. Around 60% of Legislative Councilors in 2012 to 2013 are Christian based on my estimations. The strong presence of Christian within the government system and legislative process may have substantial effects on state-society synergy of Christianity.

Conclusion

This paper shows that religion has achieved an important status in Hong Kong's welfare system. It is attributed to the fact that the government has adopted a relatively conservative approach towards social welfare and its reliance on volunteer organizations, of which many are religious groups, to provide social services to the public. Besides, it is found that Christianity has played an overwhelmingly dominant role in social services than other religious groups. The discrepancy between the Christian churches and the Chinese religious organizations in the development of social services can be explained from the perspective of state-society relations and organizational integrity. Compared to other religious groups, Christianity has developed a more positive state-society relations, which help synergize the effort of government, society, and church groups to improve social services. Moreover, church groups have generally achieved higher organizational integrity because of their longer history of development and social welfare experience, huger human and financial resources overseas or established locally, and a more solid and consistent sense of serving the public in accordance with the teachings of god.

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