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建立解决香港青年失业问题的政策框架：社会发展方法的作用（英文）

[香港] 邓广良 | 最后更新：2004-11-28

建立解决香港青年失业问题的政策框架：社会发展方法的作用（英文）

[香港] 邓广良

[内容提要] 尽管香港特别行政区政府和前任英政府都取得了举世瞩目的经济成就，然而却未能制定协调一致的社会政策和全面的社会服务计划，他们一直依靠着快速的经济增长、就业机会、家庭责任和有限的公共社会服务来满足社会需求。1997年的亚洲金融危机导致失业、贫困、无家可归现象以及其他社会问题日益增加。1997年以后，政府上述措施的弱点越发明显。金融危机之后，青年失业已成为备受人们关注的主要问题。对此，香港特别行政区政府制定了一系列的应对方案，其中不少方案都是及时恰当的。然而，这些方案始终反应被动，而且只能满足特别要求，因此我们需要一个一体化的政策框架。我们认为社会发展方案由于关注重视经济和社会政策之间的协调，巨大的社会投资以及平衡的多元化，因此具有可行性，而且它与香港政府促进经济发展的历史承诺以及一些国际组织提出的“学习权利”也是相吻合的。

Formulating a Policy Framework to Deal with Youth Unemployment in Hong Kong: Relevance of the Social Development Approach

Dr. Professor Kwong-Leung Tang

(Chairperson, Department of Social Work, the Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Abstract: Despite its impressive economic development achievements, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government as well as its predecessor have not formulated coherent social policies or created comprehensive social services programs. Instead, they have relied on rapid economic growth, occupational provisions, and familial obligations and limited

public social services to meet social needs (Tang & Midgley, 2002). The weaknesses of this approach became apparent after the 1997 Asian Financial crisis when unemployment, poverty, homelessness and other social problems increased. Youth unemployment has been a key concern since the crisis. In response, the Hong Kong SAR government has devised a number of programs to deal with this problem. Many of these programs are timely and appropriate. However, they remain reactive and ad hoc and an integrated policy framework is lacking. We argue that the social development approach with its emphasis on the harmonization of economic and social policy, extensive social investment and managed pluralism offers a viable alternative which is compatible with the Hong Kong government's historic commitment to economic development. It is also compatible with the "right to learn" as suggested by some international organizations.

Introduction

Despite their impressive economic development achievements, the East Asian governments of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan have not formulated coherent social policies or created comprehensive social services programs. Instead, they have relied on rapid economic growth, occupational provisions, and familial obligations and limited public social services to meet social needs (Tang & Midgley, 2002). In the case of Hong Kong, the weaknesses of this approach became apparent after the 1997 East Asian crisis when unemployment, poverty, homelessness and other social problems increased. Parallel to this, the onset of a knowledge-based economy in Hong Kong further aggravated these problems. Soaring unemployment has haunted the post-colonial city-state since 1997. As Hong Kong's economic restructuring continued, elementary jobs shrunk in number and became more short-term and fragmented. The outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in the beginning of 2003 severely hit the employment market.

In this context, many young people became the loser and they were not able to find jobs after graduation.^[i] In 2002, the unemployment rate for youths aged 15-19 was 27.2%, 30.1%, 35.1%, and 29.4% for the first, second, third and fourth quarters respectively. In late 2003, the same unemployment rate stood at 36.1%. In March 2004, it fell from the historic high of 37.6% (summer of 2003) to 24.4%. For the 20 to 24 cohort, the corresponding unemployment rate fell from 14.6% to 8.8%. In absolute terms, however, 16,000 youths aged between 15

and 19 were jobless whilst another 27,000 youths between 20 and 24 were out of work (Speech delivered by Cheung Kin-chung, Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and Labour, 19 March 2004 to the HK Network of Virtual Enterprise).

Who are the unemployed youths in Hong Kong? They were most junior high school graduates (either Form 3 or Form 5 school leavers), or A-level graduates who failed to gain admission to university. These young people, with their relatively low academic attainment, could not meet the needs of a knowledge-based economy. It is often believed that long-term unemployment among youth is an impediment to their full integration into society (Keiselbach, 2003). A study conducted by a voluntary agency found that the mental health of unemployed youth has deteriorated as a result of heavy burden on financial insecurity in the wake of the Asian financial crisis (Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 1998).

^[ii] Overseas studies show that if they do become long-term unemployed adults and have children, social exclusion becomes a significant problem (Kenneth et al., 1997).

As unemployment rate soared, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government faced increasing pressure from the public, which had called for more effective action in workers' retraining. In the Legislative Council, a motion was passed in January 2000 which urged the government to draw up long-term policies on education, training, migrants, labor and finance to reduce unemployment, and to assist less skilled and educated workers to better themselves (Hong Kong Standard, January 5, 2000). The motion called for those measures in view of the restructuring of the economy toward high value-added, high technology and knowledge-based industries, as well as China's expected admission to the World Trade Organization. This motion further urged the government to train local professionals for high value-added and high technology industries, as well as a review of the functions, structures and effectiveness of training institutes, such as the Vocational Training Council and the Employees Retraining Board.

Reviewing the policy responses of Hong Kong government to the challenge of globalization, the Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa said:

“We have set ourselves four major tasks to achieve this goal. First, we will consistently invest in human capital on a vast scale to form a deep, strong base of brainpower to support a knowledge economy with high value-added economic

activities. We will vastly improve the quality of teaching and learning in our basic education system. We will further enhance our tertiary education system and make more places available for our young people who have the ability and the wish to pursue their studies. Our goal is to provide tertiary education options to 60% of our students within a decade. And we will do more to encourage a spirit of lifelong learning within the community. In this regard, we have set aside US\$640 million to provide funding support to those who invest in their own development through continuing education." (Keynote Address to the PECC General Meeting, 28 November 2001).^[iii]

Despite a slight rebound after 1998, the economy of Hong Kong continued to remain weak. Facing this stark reality, the Hong Kong SAR government stated that it would use a variety of policy strategies to deal with the problems of unemployment and poverty. In 2001, the Hong Kong government pledged to commit to a job-creation package. It would spend some HK\$2.7 billion (US\$ 0.34 billion) over the next two years to ease the plight of the unemployed and the poor, with schemes ranging from retraining to the creation of temporary jobs.

Most recently, the government invested some HK\$600 million (US\$76.9 million) in dealing with the issue of youth unemployment (2004 Policy Address, Hong Kong SAR government, 7 January 2004). The money was used in creating short-term jobs and implementing various training programs like the Youth Pre-employment Training Program (YPTP) and Youth Work Experience Training Scheme. The Youth Pre-employment Training Programme provided practical support for those leaving school and seeking employment. Together, they provided over 31,000 training and employment opportunities. The government increased the training capacity of YPTP from 12,000 to 18,000 and created over 8,300 short-term posts. These jobs, with monthly salaries of HK\$4,000 (US\$512.8) and lasting for six months, cover various sectors in environmental hygiene, tourism, and cultural activities, the arts, community care and nature appreciation.

In his 2004 Policy Address, Tung Chee-hwa, the Chief Executive, indicated his concern for continuing learning and employment for young people. He promised to create more jobs for them and to "... extend the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme by two years to place into employment 10,000 young people aged 15 to 24; and third, we will introduce a one-year trial scheme to assist 1,000 young people to become self employed." (Paragraph 49)

Additionally, the SAR government had plans to set up an inter-departmental

and inter-disciplinary task force to oversee the implementation of various youth training and employment programs. A Youth Sustainable Development and Employment Fund would be set up to promote pilot schemes and exploit opportunities for training, placement and employment. Finally, the government stepped up its employment service for young job seekers through the Labour Department.

For some time, the SAR government relied on two bodies to conduct training and retraining courses: the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and the Employees Retraining Board (ERB).^[iv] The former is of immediate relevancy to young people. The government opined that they would be better oriented towards the needs of the restructuring economy to increase the trainees' employability. As revealed in the 2004 Policy Address, the Vocational Training Council's (VTC) provided more than 32,000 pre-vocational places and some 90,000 in-service training places in the past school year. On the other hand, the ERB provided some 100,000 places in 2003.

Overall, the SAR government's key response to youth unemployment is to strengthen training and retraining, hoping that economic growth could bring about increased employment among young people. Overall some successes are noted in the Hong Kong's approach: short-term job creation programs have successfully enabled some young people to get jobs. But these policy measures remain reactive, individualized, and ad hoc. Above all, they lack an integrated policy framework.

To many young people, economic downturn in Hong Kong was accompanied by increasingly difficult access to employment, which seriously compromised their social well-being. In theoretical terms, one can use the concept of "distorted development" to describe the reality unemployed young people are facing. Distorted development is defined by national economic growth that is not accompanied by social life improvements for large segments of the population (Midgley, 1995). Thus, despite impressive economic growth, large segments of the population remain trapped in poverty or underdevelopment.

Social Development as Integrated Policy Framework

Progressive policy analysts have been searching for a more appropriate and effective approach to social service provision in the wake of encroaching economic globalization and state withdrawal from the social market. Academics such as Midgley (1995) have called for the adoption of a developmental approach

that will promote social development and be consonant with the need for continued economic development. Proponents of this approach believe that social development provides an appropriate normative basis for social welfare in all parts of the world (Sherraden, 1991; Midgley, 1995, 1999; Midgley, Tracy & Livermore, 2000; Midgley & Sherraden, 2000; Tang & Ngan, 2001; Tang & Midgley, 2002). They further point out that there have been enormous improvements in standards of living for many people around the world over the last fifty years due to an emphasis on social development.

The developmentalist approach originated in the developing nations in the middle decades of the 20th century, when many newly independent states sought to adopt economic policies that would promote rapid industrialization, increased employment and improvements in living standards, but which would, at the same time, address pressing social problems (Tang & Midgley, 2002). As recently as 1995, the United Nations made a determined effort to reinvigorate these key ideals by convening the World Social Summit in Copenhagen (Midgley, 2003).

The approach of social development emphasizes the social aspects of the development agenda by harmonizing social interventions and economic development efforts within a wider commitment to social change and progress. It calls on governments to tackle the problem of "distorted development" by emphasizing social programmes that are compatible with economic development. The need for an overall developmental strategy is made apparent when "distorted development" could be seen in many parts of the world.

There are two underlying principles in this approach: first, economic development should be integrated and sustainable, bringing benefits to all citizens; and second, social welfare should be investment-oriented, seeking to enhance the capacity of all human agents to participate in the economy (Midgley, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003). Midgley argues that "social development cannot take place without economic development, and economic development is meaningless if it fails to bring about significant improvements in the well-being of the population as a whole" (1997: 181).

The productivist welfare approach in social development emphasizes the adoption of social policies that strive to enhance human functioning and capabilities. Central programmatic provisions include investments in human capital, employment and self-employment programs, social capital formation,

asset development, and the removal of barriers to economic participation (Midgley, 1997, 2003; Tang & Midgley, 2002). Governments should direct the process of social development in ways that maximize the participation of communities, the markets, and individuals in the development process.

There are several programmatic features in this approach: the creation of social planning agencies; the improvement of people's lives through economic development; and a preference for social programs that contribute positively to economic development. The developmental approach emphasizes on the following values: harmonization of economic and social goals, investment-oriented social welfare, people's participation, adequacy, equality, and promotion of social cohesion (Tang & Ngan, 2001).

Youth Unemployment and Policy Strategies

Theoretically, when one considers policy strategies for alleviating youth unemployment, one can discern a number of approaches. These include the individualist approach, the communitarian approach, and the statist approach (Midgley, 1997). The individualist approach is founded on the belief that societal development is best promoted by individuals' independent pursuit of their own self-interest. Under this approach, government assistance should be geared toward establishing an atmosphere of enterprise and limited financial help for the unemployed which allows them to engage in successful economic activity, escape poverty, and become self sufficient.

On the other hand, the communitarian perspective is based on the idea that communities of people working collectively together are the most effective means of achieving social improvements. Community provision of social services characterizes this approach. Thirdly, the statist approach sees direct government assistance and investment in programs aimed at providing assistance and social services to the poor and the unemployed as the best way to promote social welfare improvements.

Rejecting these discrete approaches, Midgley (1995) suggests the institutional perspective—a new approach, which is a hybrid of the three strategies discussed above. He argues the fact that these strategies are not mutually exclusive, and that certain aspects of each may be useful in promoting both economic growth and welfare improvements. In sum, social development promotes a pluralistic and consensual approach to social welfare, advocating the integrated involvement of state, market and community. It proposes that

governments direct the process of social development in ways that maximize the participation of communities, the markets, and individuals in both economic and social development (Midgley, 1995, 1997, 1999). By involving many constituencies in both economic and social policy, the prospects of reviving solidarity and promoting social integration increase. In this approach, productivist social policies and programs seek to invest in the capabilities of needy people to participate effectively in the productive economy.

Policy Measures

In terms of concrete measures, the government could consider the following:

Giving a strong pledging to invest in active labor market policies like retraining and training programs;

Increasing state spending on new and innovative services that could promote productivist social programs for youth employment;

Using evaluative assessments to ensure existing programs that deal with youth unemployment are efficient, cost-effective and relevant to the needs of the job market;

Continuing to invest in human capital programs and ensuring existing programs are effective; ^[v]

Investing in social capital programs to give further support to the unemployed youths;

Considering the appropriateness of asset-based programs like individual retraining saving accounts; ^[vi]

Considering the appropriateness of passive labor programs like unemployment insurance; ^[vii]

Conducting of rigorous research of life situations of the unemployed young people (in particular, young people from socially excluded families) as well as the interface between educational institutions and labor market.

The final measure is important. Overseas evidence has shown that individuals leaving school without qualifications are four times more likely to be unemployed than those with qualifications (Nicaise, 2000). Preventing and combating youth unemployment therefore requires active measures both in the labour market and in the institutions responsible for preparing the future workforce-educational institutions.

Consequently, investments in human and social capital are seen as important components of the social development approach. Social and human capital

provides people with the means to utilize the opportunities created by economic growth and improve their social condition. There is some evidence to show that policies and programs in the area of youth unemployment seem most successful in those countries in which business and labor groups cooperate actively on policy formulation (Bresnick, 1984).

Relevance of Social Development

In all, the social development approach is relevant to the post-crisis Hong Kong in the following ways. Firstly, it emphasizes a proactive formulation of a new normative basis for state intervention (Midgley, 1997; Tang & Midgley, 2002). Instead of government's playing a passive role in labor employment; it builds on the region's tradition of economic intervention to urge policy makers to actively address social concerns at a time when intervention of this kind is urgently needed.

Secondly, it seeks to end the bifurcation of social services and economic development. By promising the harmonization of social and economic development, and emphasizing productivist forms of social provision, it ensures that social policies and programmes contribute positively to development without creating conditions of welfare dependency or harming economic growth, both of which are viewed with trepidation by the region's political leaders (Tang & Midgley, 2002). It is this emphasis on productivist social welfare that provides a normative basis for social policy that should have particular appeal to the Hong Kong government.

Third, social development promotes a pluralistic approach to social policy. Recognizing that the state cannot and indeed, should not assume sole responsibility for economic development, social welfare, environmental protection and other desired activities, social development urges the integration of state, market and community involvement. Known as the institutional approach to social development, it proposes that governments direct the process of social development in ways that maximize the participation of communities, the markets, and individuals in both economic and social development. This approach should appeal to the Hong Kong SAR government which has pledged to use a tripartite approach in social policy delivery (market, government and NGOs) but has not dismissed the contributions of the market and popular participation.

Fourth, drawing on its pluralistic approach, social development promotes a consensual development model. The major stakeholders involved in promoting

social development include the state, the community, non-governmental organizations, employers and workers. The involvement of these different groups is very important to Hong Kong that has been threatened by rising unemployment and inequities and where social and political divisions are becoming more marked. By involving many constituencies in both economic and social policy, the prospects of reviving solidarity and promoting social integration increase.

Social Development and Globalization

In tackling the problem of youth unemployment, the Hong Kong SAR government must have a clear vision and objectives for education and occupational retraining. As Chisholm (1997) points out, economic globalization^[viii] and technological change has created a learning society; there is a need to view skill acquisition and renewal as a never-ending process. In other words, a lifelong learning approach is urgently needed to help selected groups. The SAR government, like its colonial predecessor, had shied away from articulating a lifelong learning approach.

Instead it took a more remedial and ad hoc approach to workers' retraining. When industrialized nations have realized life-long learning approach is absolutely necessary to help their citizens maintain a more highly skilled workforce, it is still unclear when the post-colonial government, which has long favoured a non-intervention approach, would realize that its orientation should be fundamentally changed.^[ix]

Youth training is most meaningful when linked to the developmental approach in social policy which has a focus on sustainable and people-centered development. The term "social development" refers to the efforts of the developing countries to develop economic growth and simultaneously raise standards of living. The UN has been a strong proponent of this approach as exemplified by the World Summit on Social Development which was held in Copenhagen in 1995.

Social development approach is relevant to Hong Kong. Theorists from this perspective point to the developmental experience of Asian states as illustrating the manner in which social investment serves to support the economy. Thus, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea are all authoritarian developmental states and pro-growth in orientation. Yet, these developmental states tend to have extensive social services in such areas as housing, education, labour and health. These social services are considered a social investment and as furthering their

national economic development goals. The approach appeals to the developmental states in East Asia since these states emphasize the productive function of social welfare in the course of their economic development.

Social development has taken a pragmatic approach to social policy. Overall, this approach is strongly statist and interventionist: the government is the key player who has to play an active role in the harmonization of social and economic developments. It is an approach “promoting a particular form of action for incorporation more widely in social work” (Payne, 1997: 213). For the proponents of social development, all social needs like youth employment must still be met, the state still has a vital role to play and formal institutional structures are still necessary to social development.

As noted, many socially disadvantaged groups (women, children and youth etc.) are excluded from Hong Kong’s economic progress. The needs of these groups became particularly acute after the onset of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. To redress these problems, social development programs should take special care of the needs of these people so as to ensure social equality and justice.

Needless to say, training programs of young people in Hong Kong are productivist and investment-oriented since human capital is being enhanced through the process. Increased education and the enhancement of young people’s skills would be a viable option to lift them out of unemployment and poverty. Social development in Hong Kong should mean that young people are protected in times of economic recession. For some time, the Hong Kong SAR government has a leading role to play in bridging active and passive labor market policies. Western experiences have proven that the integration of both active and passive labour market policies provide a better work environment for workers as well as a guarantee of an adequate livelihood. In this regard, they would benefit unemployed young people as well.

Above all, social development approach is compatible with the idea of “right to learn” as suggested by some international organizations like the United Nations. Internationally, the ideas of “right to learn” and “right to education” discussed in the context of adult education have long been discussed.^[x] The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have been an active promoter of adult education since its establishment. To pursue this end, it has organized a number of international adult education conferences. It has to be

noted that lifelong learning was first proposed as the policy goal in the 1960 International Conference on Adult Education (Montreal). Later, the 1972 Tokyo Conference emphasized the contribution of adult education as a factor in the democratization of education, social and economic development, and cultural development. In 1985, the Paris Conference stressed the principle of the right to learn which has not been recognized in many developing countries. At the fourth International UNESCO Conference in 1985, the declaration adopted unanimously defined the right to learn in the following terms:

The right to read and write

The right to question and analyse

The right to imagine and create

The right to read and write one's own history

The right to have access to educational resources

The right to develop individual skills

Importantly, the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, a UNESCO intergovernmental assembly convened in Hamburg, has reaffirmed officially the right to education and the right to learn throughout life: "Recognition of the right to education and the right to learn throughout life is more than ever a necessity; it is the right to read and write, the right to question and analyze, the right to have access to resources, and to develop and practise individual and collective skills and competences" (Hamburg Declaration, 1997).

As far as young people in Hong Kong are concerned, they are increasingly being marginalized by the forces of globalization and economic upheavals. Thus, the right to learn and right to education are most relevant to them. Any barrier that is set up to prevent our youth people from fully participating in the society should be eliminated. In this respect, the Hamburg Declaration (1997) captures the importance of continuing education to young people when it acknowledges that "adult education thus becomes more than a right; it is a key to the twenty-first century. It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society."

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[i] The unemployment problem among the less skilled workforce is not unique to Hong Kong. In Europe, for example, high unemployment among selected groups (for instance, young people and marginalized groups) is prevalent. This has pushed many European countries to promote vocational training. In the case of youth, the focus is on general knowledge, learning skills, and training in information gathering and use.

[ii] It has to be noted that some international human rights treaties to which Hong Kong has pledged its commitments emphasize the many rights of young people. For instance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations on 20 November 1989, affirms that a child is not only a fragile being that needs to be protected, but also a person that has a right to be educated. A child is a person who has the right to have fun, learn and express himself/herself.

[iii] Download from webpage:

[click here](#)

[iv] The VTC provides cost-effective alternative routes and flexible pathways for school leavers and adult learners to acquire skills and knowledge for lifelong learning and enhanced employability. The ERB only provides services for those who are aged 30 or above.

[v] The Hong Kong SAR government should not promote an over-simplistic notion of human capital theory. It should not assume that more retraining would lead to more employment.

[vi] In a study done in 1999, some 52% of the survey respondents (people undergoing retraining in Hong Kong, n=659) opined that they were receptive to this idea (Tang, Cheung & Forget, 2001).

[vii] In the same study, support for unemployment benefit program amounted to 85%. See Tang, Cheung and Forget (2001).

[viii] Globalization is a difficult concept to define. Following James Midgley (1997), we see it as "a process of global integration in which diverse peoples, economies, cultures, and political processes are increasingly subjected to international influences" (xi). Economic globalization has been a cause for concern for many. Authors like Bauman (1998) contend that global economic liberalization has had a deleterious

impact on employment, economic stability, the environment, incomes and human well-being.

[ix] Tung Chee Hwa at different times pledged to support the idea of lifelong education. As mentioned above, the setting up of a fund for lifelong education in early 2000s shows some financial commitment on the part of the government. It remains to see how effective such a fund would be.

[x] As “youth” is broadly defined in Hong Kong (sometimes well beyond the statutory age of adulthood in other countries), the concept of adult education is applicable to many of them.

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