

# Collaborative vs. Adversarial Relationship Between the State and Civil Society in Facing Public Disaster The Case of Hong Kong in the SARS Crisis

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A study on activities launched by the civil society in dealing with the SARS crisis in Hong Kong identifies that civil society in Hong Kong simultaneously performs the collaborative and adversarial functions, embracing a sensitive balance between trust and risk when entrusting the state to serve the public good. Drawing on the survey analysis, the article argues that the complexity of state and civil society relation has to be understood as dialectics in the “collaboration/adversary” duality. Several hypotheses are generated from the study for further research.

**Key words:** civil society, public disasters, state-civil society collaboration, SARS

## Introduction

Hong Kong was seriously hit when the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic struck the territory in the misty spring of 2003. The then unknown virus infected 1,755 individuals and claimed the lives of nearly 300. In responding to this unprecedented community-wide health hazard, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Hong Kong, including welfare agencies, schools, religious organizations, as well as community and grassroots organizations, initiated and organized numerous actions and responses to the SARS crisis. Some of these actions supplemented governmental efforts. For example, while the government focused on information giving and public health education at the outbreak of SARS, the welfare

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agencies set up different hotline services and provided needy emotional support to the general public (Leung & Wong, 2005). There was also much cooperation between the state and NGOs, like “Operation UNITE,” which was a territory-wide cleaning and education campaign initiated by the civil society but fully supported by the Government of the Special Administrative Region (henceforth referred to as the Hong Kong Government or the Government). Such concerted endeavors support the claim of complementariness and interdependence between civil society and the state, despite that civil society plays a simultaneous advocacy role to challenge the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of governmental actions. As the pandemic crisis subsided in the summer of 2003, some civil society actions also receded.

This article is based on a study conducted from the SARS outbreak to an extended period in its aftermath on the actions and reactions of civil society to the community health hazard. The study set out to understand the dialectics between collaboration and adversary in the desired “state-society synergy” (Evans, 1995; Jalali, 2002), as the duties of the government and the civil society were negotiated and played out in dealing with the communal crisis.

## **Collaborative versus Adversarial Relation between Civil Society and the State in Disaster Mitigation**

The relationship between the state and civil society has been a popular theme in the study of community crisis or disaster mitigation (Evans, 1995; Jalali, 2002; Powell, 2000; Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1997; Shaw & Goda, 2004). In analyzing the state-civil society relation after the earthquake in Turkey, Jalali (2002) argues that an ideal disaster response system can only be based on state-civil society relations that are both collaborative and adversarial. Whilst acting as advocates for survivors and forcing changes at the state level, civil society also provides social capital to support government actions (Jalali, 2002). A “state-society synergy” (Evans, 1995; Jalali, 2002), “where civil society supplements the work of the government and voices the concern of the voiceless—are essential for alleviating the suffering of victims and creating an effective disaster response system” (Jalali, 2002, p. 124). The dialectics between collaborative and the adversarial relation in the “state-society synergy,” however, has to be understood in the light of “trust” (Seligman, 1997).

Civil society, as characterized by a network of voluntary associations and citizen organizations, has always been taken as a platform for the generation of trust and development of social capital (Morris & Rodriguez, 2005; Newton, 2001; Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2001). A high level of social trust is seen as the basis of cooperation because it mutually reinforces expectations about reciprocity (Misztal, 2001; Scott, 1999). In the reciprocity-based model of trust, trust assumes predictability and rationality enhanced by the threat of retribution and retaliation (Morris & Rodriguez, 2005). Trust is the confidence that no party will exploit another’s vulnerability in an exchange (Sabel, 1993). Yet, such trust is built on a social contract

in which is assumed a capacity of exacting fair amounts of retribution when trust fails (Morris & Rodriguez, 2005). Morris & Rodriguez (2005) further explicate that trust in this reciprocity-based model necessitates a general suspicion and distrust as a safeguard against any potential assault or ploy. In this way, trust is a source of risk that has to be managed properly (Webb, 2006), as trust is about mediating and negotiating distrust (Morris & Rodriguez, 2005). As Misztal (2001) proclaims, healthy distrust is essential for democratic progress. This dialectic analysis between trust and risk is precisely the premise on which Jahali (2002) builds her thesis that “civil society needs to be collaborative (acting as partner) but also adversarial, giving voice to the concerns of the voiceless” (Jalali, 2002, p. 135), in the necessary safeguard against the risk of trusting. In this article, we explore the relation between the state and civil society in the light of the “collaborative-adversarial” and “trust-risk” dialectics, when Hong Kong was confronted with the SARS crisis. To capture the situational context of the study, development of the 2003 SARS crisis in Hong Kong is first deliberated.

### **The SARS Crisis in Hong Kong: Context of the Study**

The SARS crisis started with an outburst of the epidemic in the Prince of Wales Hospital in early March 2003, when many doctors, nurses, and medical students were infected by a then virtually unknown virus. Worries and anxieties built up in the Hong Kong community as the number of infected cases grew. The absence of knowledge about the virus, coupled with its speedy spread, created a crisis atmosphere that was unprecedented in Hong Kong. Knowledge about the new epidemic was so imperfect that the nature of the virus, the symptoms of infection, the route of transmission, and the appropriate treatment were all subject to recurrent controversy and continual discovery. Whether facemasks should be worn in public places was also a subject of debate when the threat was initially detected. But the controversy was short-lived. The threat was clearly recognized and this was reflected in the citizens’ hunt for facemasks shortly after the onset of the epidemic.

Following the detection of the threat and a series of public warnings, the community of Hong Kong reluctantly acknowledged that the customary ways of coping with public health problems did not work any more. For the first time since World War II, emergency medical services were temporarily suspended in the Prince of Wales Hospital on March 19, 2003, and subsequently in other infected hospitals as well. The communal hazard also threatened normal daily routines in Hong Kong. Witnessing the steep rise in infected cases, the Hong Kong Government announced on March 27, 2003, the suspension of classes in all schools below tertiary level. University authorities followed suit, and activity in all educational institutions was virtually put to a halt.

The Government’s decision to suspend classes in all schools was related to the outbreak of a large-scale community infection in the residential area of Amoy Gardens, in which coincidental environmental factors caused the infection of hundreds of

residents in a small residential community. Residents in the most infected block of Amoy Gardens were quarantined in their own flats on March 31, 2003, and were later quarantined in holiday camps in an effort to control the infection. The Amoy Gardens infection, which eventually accounted for more than 40 deaths, prompted the introduction of quarantine measures for the family members of infected patients. At the same time, the number of contracted cases went into a steep rise. The highest number of new infections in a single day during the period was 81. With such a high number of new cases, a sense of risk built up quickly in Hong Kong. This sense of risk was manifested among consumers in a rush to supermarkets to stock up when, on April 1, April Fools' Day, a 14-years-old lad spread a rumor over the Internet to the effect that the border would be closed (Ta Kung Pao, 2003).

In the face of an invisible and unknown virus hiding in the community, the customary values of trust and courtesy came under challenge. Government promotional clips on television urged the citizens of Hong Kong not to use their hands to touch their eyes, nose, and mouth, and to wash their hands always before touching any part of their face. As carriers of the virus might not present symptoms, people were advised to keep others at a distance. Shaking hands, a normal expression of courtesy in social life, was discouraged. In the shadow of SARS, social life in Hong Kong was virtually brought to a temporary halt, when people were asked to avoid public places and close encounters with other people. Ostensibly, SARS had emerged as more than a public health hazard. It was a challenge to the customary life of the people in Hong Kong. The public health hazard arising from the SARS epidemic was beyond the experience of the Hong Kong Government, and was not included in any pre-conceived contingency plan. Amidst the uncertainties accompanying the new virus and in the absence of any precedent, complaints and arguments were not wanting during the period. One main argument at that time was whether sufficient protective facilities were provided to hospital staff and whether they were distributed in an efficient manner.

It was not until April 12, 2003, that infection figures began to display a steady downward trend. As the Hong Kong community began to come to terms with the reality of the epidemic, various sectors began to take measures to resume operations in the shadow of the threat from SARS. Educational institutions issued a policy on wearing facemasks when classes resumed. The facilities management sector upgraded their cleaning standards and enhanced their cleaning procedures to regain the confidence of users. The operators of public transport provided free masks to passengers and advised them to wear them during their journey. Civil society also started to contribute its own resources when the Government, on its own, was seen as inadequate in responding to the disaster. The media initiated a fund-raising campaign to provide protective clothing and masks for medical workers. Some young professionals established a website to announce the residential and work addresses of infected SARS cases when the Government refused to do so. Welfare agencies also initiated a number of contingent services for vulnerable groups to supplement the

Government's efforts. The pandemic began to recede on June 23, 2003, when a null infection was registered. The pandemic crisis came to a close in August 2003, when all SARS patients were discharged from hospitals. Contingent and ad hoc measures by the Government and civil society were gradually ended, replaced by longer-term health education and community support initiatives.

During the SARS crisis, 1,377 reported events were launched by NGOs. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), a coordinating body for welfare agencies, claimed that the SARS crisis united NGOs, the business sector, professional bodies, and the Government in a strategic partnership (HKCSS, 2003). Critics were meanwhile cynical about this "state-civil society partnership." Shiu (2003) argued that most activities launched by civil society during the SARS period were "repeated political narratives" and "public relations tactics," representing a collusion between the state and the civil society for rebuilding legitimacy and authority of the state. Law (2003) explained the ready "collusion" between the Hong Kong Government and NGOs by the legacy of colonial governance culture was characterized by the NGOs' heavy financial dependence on the Government. No empirical evidence is, however, available to support the above divergent claims about the relation between the state and civil society during the SARS crisis. The research on which this article is based is an endeavor to fill this empirical gap for further exploration of the relationship between the state and civil society.

The main objective of this article is to explore the purpose and nature of the post-disaster actions and activities of NGOs, and the perceived role and perceived relationship of the non-governmental organizers with other stakeholders in handling similar community crisis.

## Research Method

The current study was conducted in June 2004, in the aftermath of the SARS crisis, by employing a survey method. By Internet search with Yahoo, Google, and Wisenews (a Chinese News database covering all major Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong and China), it was found that 128 NGOs in Hong Kong have organized activities in response to SARS during the period from March 2003 to March 2004. A questionnaire was posted to these 128 NGOs. The major items covered in the questionnaire include: (a) a description of SARS-related activities organized; (b) difficulties encountered during the organizing process; (c) the perceived arena of risk engendered by the SARS crisis; (d) the perceived level of trust in other stakeholders in combating similar crisis; (e) the perception of the organization's role in the face of a similar crisis; and (f) the perceived extent of contact and linkage with different stakeholders. Altogether, 55 organizations successfully completed and returned the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 43 percent. The majority of the responding organizations (75 percent) were social service agencies, whilst about one-tenth (11 percent) were religious organizations, and another one-tenth (9 percent) were self-help and mutual help groups.

## Findings

### SARS-related Activities by the NGOs

In the survey, 211 SARS-related activities were reported by the responding organizations. Among these 211 activities, the majority of them comprised provision of financial/material support (55 percent), whilst 29 percent comprised fundraising or collection of in-kind materials, 9 percent comprised health education activities and 5 percent comprised provision of emotional support. The major targets of these activities were families of patients who had contracted SARS (44 percent) and high-risk groups (15 percent) such as elderly persons and young children. Among others, 11 percent of the activities targeted the medical workers whose contribution to mitigating the SARS crisis was highly commended by the Hong Kong society.

The responding organizations were asked to indicate the goals they assigned to the 211 SARS-related activities. As some activities had multiple goals, 298 goal items were reported. These goal items were classified into “collaborative” goals or “adversarial” goals, in terms of their agreement with the Government’s stated mission in relation to combating community health hazard. Among the 298 stated goal items, 93 percent were “collaborative” goals, whilst 7 percent were “adversarial” goals. The details can be found in Table 1.

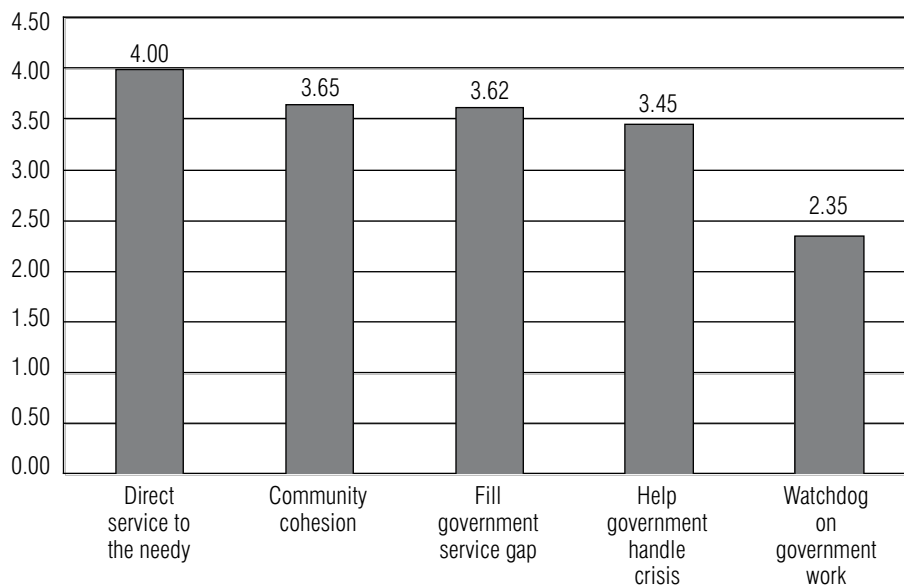
TABLE 1  
Distribution of Activities by Goals

Goal category	Goal items	Frequency (%)	% in 211 activities
Collaborative goals	Preventing the re-occurrence of SARS	76 (26%)	36.0%
	Imparting knowledge and information about SARS to citizens	50 (17%)	23.7%
	Providing counseling, support or direct service to the needy	49 (16%)	23.2%
	Enhancing community cohesion & solidarity	49 (16%)	23.2%
	Providing finance and in-kind assistance to the needy	27 (9%)	12.8%
	Helping Government implement anti-SARS activities	26 (9%)	12.3%
Adversarial goals	Monitoring Government departments	5 (2%)	2.4%
	Filling up service gap arising from Government inadequacy	16 (5%)	7.6%
		298 (100%)	

### Perceived Role of the NGOs in Similar Crisis

The respondents were asked in the survey to indicate their perceived role in confronting a similar crisis on a five-points Likert scale. The role as “provider of direct service to the needy” received the highest mean score of 4.00, whilst the role as “facilitator to enhance community cohesion and solidarity” had a mean score of 3.65, and “auxiliary to fill up Government service gap” and “auxiliary to help Government handle crisis” had a mean score of 3.62 and 3.45 respectively. The responding organizations did not commonly take up the “watchdog” role, which received the lowest mean score of 2.35.

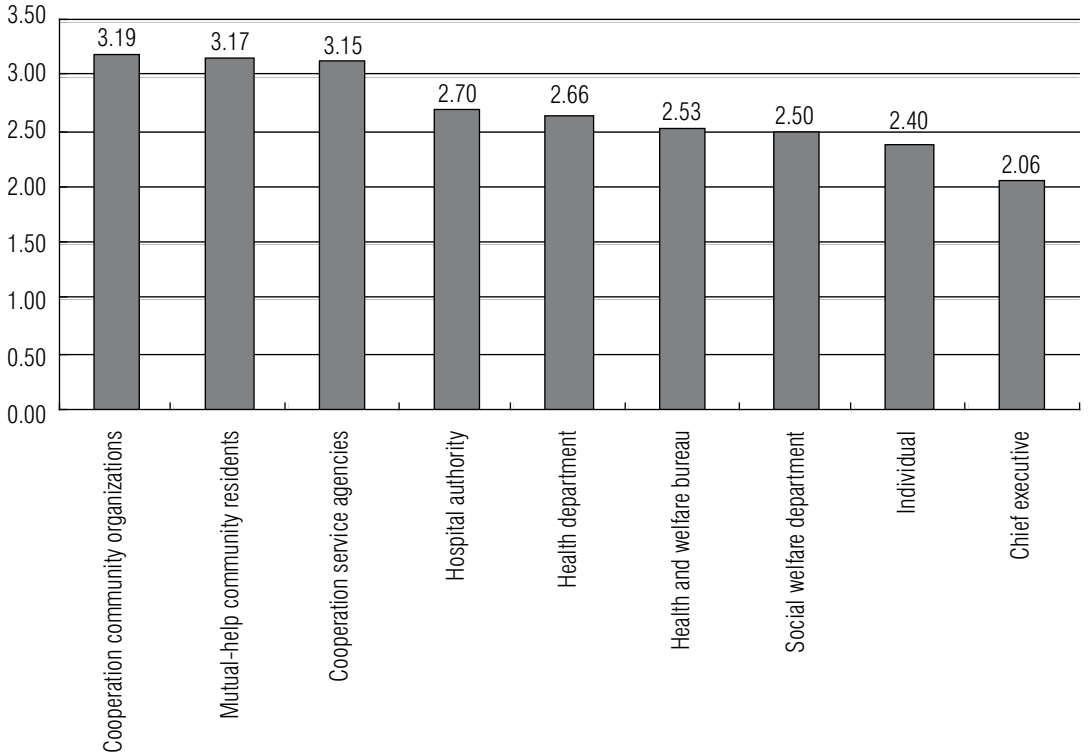
CHART 1  
Roles Perceived by NGOs in Combating Similar Crisis



### Trust among Different Actors in Combating Similar Crisis

We further explored trust among the responding organizations as manifested in their perception of relationship with other stakeholders. “Trust” was measured in the study by a five-points Likert scale on the perceived reliability of different stakeholders in combating similar crisis, and the organization’s perceived reciprocal reliance on different stakeholders. It was found that perceived reliability was highest for “community-based organizations” (mean score = 3.19) and “community members / residents” (mean score = 3.17). “NGOs” had a slightly lower score of 3.15, whilst all the government departments received a score less than the neutral mark of 3. Among the government departments, the Hospital Authority had the highest score at 2.53. The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region received the lowest trust score at 2.06.

CHART 2  
**Perceived reliability of different actors in responding to the SARS crisis**

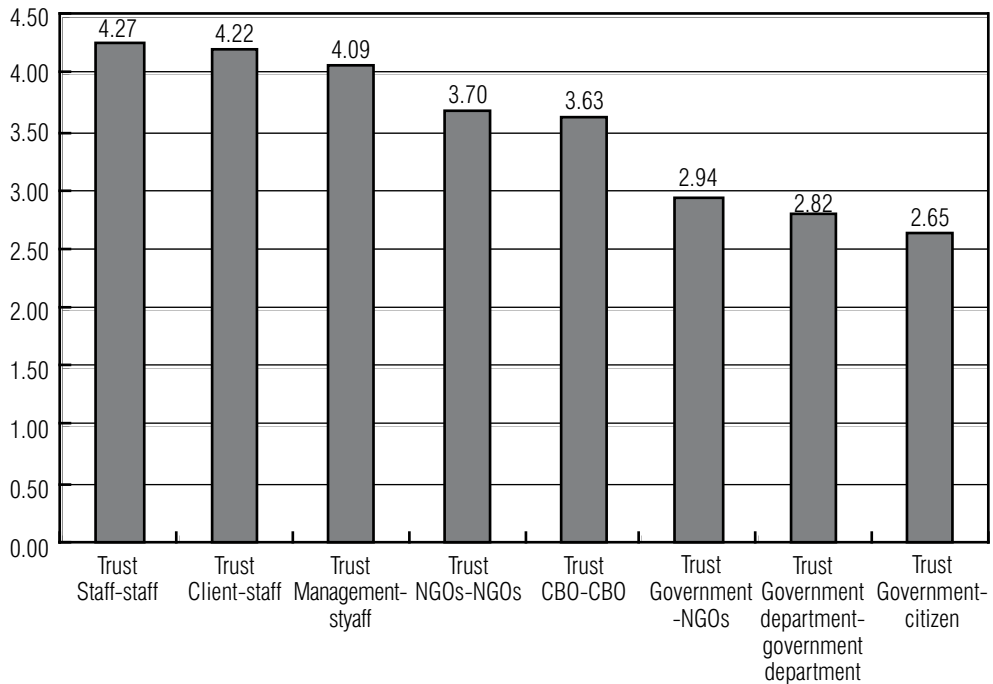


**Roles perceived by the NGOs in Combating Similar Crisis**

Reciprocal reliance “among staff,” “between client and staff,” and “between management and staff” were categorized as “intra-organizational trust,” whilst reciprocal reliance “between the organization and other NGOs” and “between the organization and other community-based organizations” were categorized as “inter-organizational trust.” All perceived reciprocal reliance involving a governmental party was categorized as “trust on Government.” It was found that “intra-organizational trust” was the highest among the responding organizations, with an aggregate mean score of 4.19 (mean score for perceived reciprocal reliance “among their own staff” = 4.27, “between client and staff” = 4.22, and “between management and staff” = 4.09). “Inter-organizational trust” had an aggregate mean score of 3.67 (mean score for perceived reciprocal reliance in relation to other NGOs = 3.70, in relation to community-based organizations = 3.63), still standing on the positive side). Trust levied on the Government, however, received the lowest aggregate mean score at 2.82. Trust between the Government and NGOs (mean score = 2.94), between the government departments (mean score = 2.82), and between the Government and civilians (mean score = 2.65) all stood below the neutral mark of 3.



CHART 3  
 Perceived Reciprocal Reliance on Different Actors



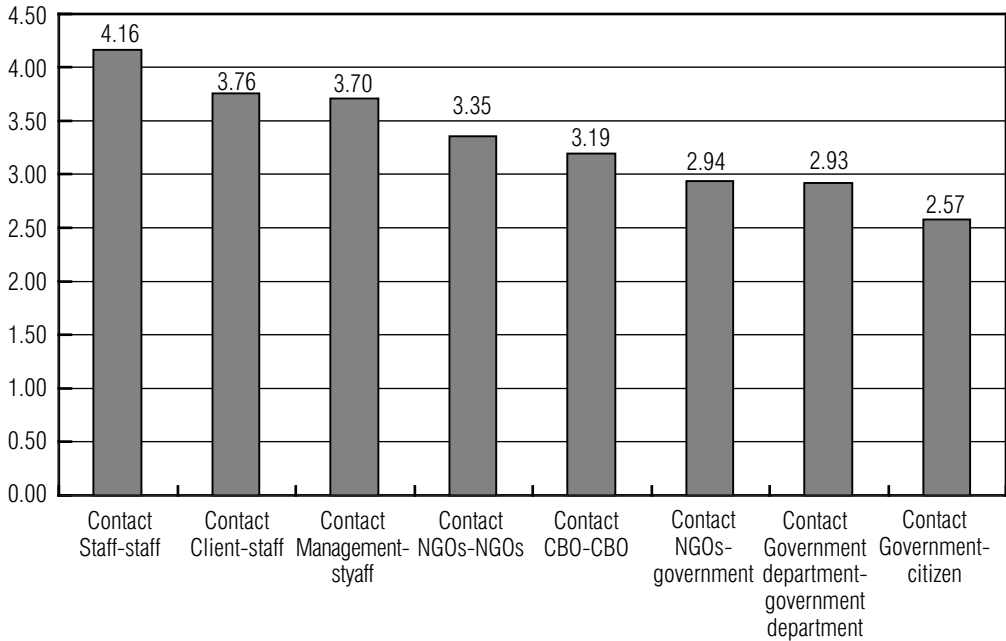
### Contact and Linkage between Different Actors

The responding NGOs were asked in the survey to indicate their linkage with other actors. Perceived close contact and linkage was highest among staff in the organizations (mean score = 4.16), whereas the mean score between client and staff was 3.76, and between management and staff was 3.7. The contact and linkage between the NGOs had a lower mean score of 3.35, and that of between community-based organizations was 3.19. The mean score for contact and linkage between the Government and other parties stood at the lowest (mean score for linkage between the Government and NGOs = 2.94, between government departments = 2.93, and between the Government and civilians = 2.57). The rank order was consonant with that of perceived trust between different actors.

### Correlation between Activity Goal and Perceived Reliability of Different Actors

Correlations between the number of collaborative and adversarial activities, and between activity goal and perceived reliability of different actors are shown in Table 2. It is found that the number of collaborative and adversarial activities is positively correlated ( $R = .437$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and the correlation is highly significant. It means that organizations taking part in more collaborative activities tend to have more adversarial activities too. It rejects the assumption of a dichotomous division between collaborative and adversarial organizations in terms of their relation with the state.

CHART 4  
**Contact and Linkage between Different Actors**



Meanwhile, the number of adversarial activities is found to be correlated to perceived reliability of the Government ( $R = .283, p < 0.05$ ). Organizations perceiving the Government as reliable tend to organize more adversarial activities. It indicates that the adversarial function of NGOs is not contradictory to their trust in the state. Adversarial endeavors can sit comfortably with a trust of the state’s capacity and reliability.

Statistical analysis also found that the targets of perceived reliability are highly correlated to each other. Perceived reliability of the Government is highly correlated to perceived reliability of community ( $R = .420, p < 0.01$ ) and individual ( $R = .388, p < 0.01$ ), whereas perceived reliability of community is also highly correlated to perceived reliability of individual ( $R = .519, p < 0.01$ ). It suggests that trust is a general attitude characterizing an organization’s disposition, and trust in one arena may induce trust in another.

**Correlation between Activity Goal and Perceived Role of NGOs**

The correlations between activity goal and the perceived roles reported by NGOs are shown in Table 3. The number of collaborative activities is significantly correlated to the role of organizations as “facilitator to enhance community cohesion and solidarity” ( $R = .282, p < 0.05$ ) and “auxiliary to help the Government handle crisis” ( $R = .330, p < 0.05$ ). Both, a community focus and a state support orientation in the organizational mission, purport to collaborative activities at times of community crisis.

TABLE 2  
Correlation between Activity Goal and Trust in Different Actors

		1	*			
		.5	.3			
		*				
		.5	.3			
		.3	.1			
		.3	.3			
		.3	.3			
		.6	.8			
		.3	.0			
		.5	.5			

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 3  
Correlations between Activity Goal and Different Roles of the NGOs

		No. of adversarial activities	No. of collaborative activities
Role fill government service gap	Pearson correlation	.262	.219
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053	.108
	N	55	55
Role help government handle crisis	Pearson correlation	.170	.330(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.214	.014
	N	55	55
Role watchdog	Pearson correlation	.254	.184
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.064	.184
	N	54	54
Role community cohesion	Pearson correlation	.200	.282(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.143	.037
	N	55	55
Role direct service to needy	Pearson correlation	-.015	.203
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.913	.137
	N	55	55

## Discussion

During the SARS pandemic hazard in Hong Kong, criticism of government response was not wanting from NGOs and the mass media. There were numerous civil-society initiatives to supplement or rebuke the Government's actions, which were seen as inadequate in combating the public disaster. Promulgation of the residential and work addresses of infected SARS cases on the Internet by a group of young professionals against the Government's policy was one of the examples of adversarial actions during the crisis. Whilst adversarial actions were more visible by the media attention they used to attract, its volume was, however, small compared with that of collaborative actions, particularly in the aftermath of the crisis. Less than 10 percent of the non-governmental initiatives identified by the study included an adversarial goal. Meanwhile, the non-governmental sector was comfortable with a collaborative role in working with the state, as indicated in the study by a positive attitude toward their role as "auxiliary to fill up the Government service gap" and "auxiliary to help the Government handle crisis."

Despite a propensity for collaboration, the civil society in Hong Kong does not predispose to a high trust on the state. The study identified that the Government was at the tail of the league table when it came to trust they earned from the responding NGOs. A suspicious sentiment prevails among the non-governmental sector, amidst its readiness to collaborate with the state. The study findings do not support the alleged positive and harmonious relation between NGOs and the Government as portrayed by the HKCSS (2003). This suspicious sentiment can be related to the greater distance in relationship between the civil society and the state, when contact and linkage with the governmental sector is far from being close.

It is worth noting that a suspicious sentiment on the state does not necessarily encourage adversarial actions in the face of public crisis. The study identified that the number of adversarial activities is positively correlated to perceived reliability of the Government. Contrary to the rule of simple logic, organizations with greater trust in the Government tend to organize more adversarial activities. The data suggests that the adversarial function of NGOs can be consonant with their trust in the state. Adversarial endeavors may represent an expectation and quest for the enhancement of state functions, which can only be built on trust in the state's capacity for improvement. To a certain extent, this hypothesis of latent trust in the state echoes Law's (2003) thesis about the dependency nature of civil society in Hong Kong, in the legacy of the "colonial governance culture." Notwithstanding, the finding also indicates that NGOs' adversarial function and watchdog role can be activated by the risk and uncertainty that communal crisis engenders, promising a critical review of their customary dependency on the state.

The positive correlation between collaborative and adversarial activities as identified in the study is another finding that is contrary to popular assumption. The organizations taking part in more collaborative activities tend to have more adversarial activities. It rejects the popular assumption in Hong Kong of a dichotomous division of organizations in their relationship with the state. Nevertheless, the variable of organizational size and resources was not included in this study. Further investigation in future research is necessary to ascertain the impact of organizational capacity and power in the propensity

for collaborative and adversarial activities at times of communal hazard.

Jalali (2002, p. 123) argues that civil society performs multiple roles in disaster. It “creates social capital (cooperation and trust) for effective disaster relief, intermediates between state institutions and the concerns of disaster victims and supports the public sphere by raising issues in the public arena and demanding public action.” Her depiction of the multiple role of the civil society is witnessed in Hong Kong when it encountered the public disaster of SARS. Ostensibly, the NGOs in Hong Kong are ready to realize their dual role in the “state-society synergy” (Evans, 1995; Jalali, 2002), whereby both collaborative and adversarial functions are incorporated into their relationship with the Government when it comes to combating public disaster. Suspicion as indicated in the low level of trust in the Government renders a necessary safeguard against any potential assault or ploy in the building of trust (Morris & Rodriguez, 2005), amidst the civil society’s readiness for collaboration. At the heart of the “state-society synergy” (Jalali, 2002) is a sensitive balance between trust and risk when the state is entrusted to serve the public good. Meanwhile, whilst public disaster can engender a strong civil society by bonding communities together in the face of adversity, it also stimulates adversarial activities and activates the watchdog role of NGOs in Hong Kong, amidst their customary dependency on the state.

## Conclusion

The study has rejected several simplistic assumptions in understanding the relationship between the state and civil society. Instead of a presumed division of NGOs into collaborative and adversarial organizations in terms of their relationship with the state, both collaborative and adversarial functions tend to co-exist in some NGOs. Instead of a taken-for-granted alignment between trust in the state and the extent of collaboration, organizations with greater trust in the Government tend to organize more adversarial activities; and the propensity for collaboration does not predispose to a high trust in the state. The findings are indicative of the complexity of state-civil society relation, which has to be understood as dialectics in the “collaboration / adversary” duality. As an exploratory endeavor, several hypotheses are generated from this study: (a) closer contact and linkage between the state and civil society enhances civil society’s trust in the state; (b) NGOs engage in adversarial activities with a trust in the state’s capacity for improvement; (c) risk and uncertainty can activate the adversarial function and watchdog role of the NGOs. These hypotheses are subject to verification in future research.

There are some methodological and theoretical limitations in this study. First, the list of organizations constituting the sampling frame of the survey is mainly gathered from newspapers and Internet reports at the height of the SARS crisis. Unpublicized small scale or ad-hoc activities as well as activities held outside the Internet search period were excluded from the study. Accordingly, this study tends to report activities organized by formal and more established organizations, which are more susceptible to financial dependency on the Government in the specific situation of Hong Kong. Second, only 7 percent of the reported activities have “adversarial” goals. The data is

not sufficient for meaningful in-depth comparison and analysis in the study. Finally, as there is no validated scale in Hong Kong on “trust” between civil society and the state, a simple scale was derived for measurement in the study. The scale requires further development and validation. Last but not least, the study remains exploratory, generating hypotheses for further investigation rather than offering any theoretical proposition. By taking advantage of the SARS crisis as a situational context, we hope that this exploratory study can advance our understanding of the dialectic relationship between civil society and the state for further theoretical development.

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# Lessons Unlearned – Planning Disaster and Community Anomie

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ERNEST CHUI

This article critically reviews the Hong Kong Government's 'new town' policy. It argues that the case of Tin Shui Wai illustrates the 'planning disasters' where casualties are resulted from poor government planning; a lesson that should have been learned from its predecessor, Tuen Mun, in the early 1980s. The analysis shows how rigid bureaucratic administration led to inadequate community facilities and services; the physical remoteness and the homogeneity of the populations stalled economic development; and large numbers of new immigrants, ethnic minorities, and people of low socioeconomic status concentrated in a virtually deserted community that was characterized by various social problems. The article concludes with the recommendation to make community development efforts to nurture social capital in anomic communities.

**Key words:** planning disaster, community development, anomie, social capital

## Introduction

This article aims to examine the case of a new town that was developed in recent years and discuss the problems with Hong Kong's town planning and development. Originally, before it was ceded to Great Britain in 1842, Hong Kong, later known as "The Pearl of the Orient," was merely a small fishing village in southeastern China. However, with the advent of urbanization and economic modernization in the 1970s, Hong Kong has become one of the most prosperous and cosmopolitan cities in Asia. The British colonial administration laid a sound foundation for efficient government administration that paved the way for the Special Administrative Region Government to sustain effective governance upon the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. Nevertheless, despite the commendable track record of effective and efficient administration, there are occasional problems, attributable to bureaucratic rigidity and the failure to correct earlier mistakes that have resulted in great social costs to the people of Hong Kong.

The poor planning and implementation of the development has brought serious social problems to the residents living in this new town to the extent that the community has been "eclipsed" and haunted by anomie (Chui, 2003). This aptly

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illustrates the social costs borne by the public as a result of a government “planning disaster” (Hall, 1980; The Planning Disaster Coalition, n.d.), the adverse consequences of which might perhaps be comparable to those caused by a natural disaster. Such disasters result from a lopsided emphasis on physical planning and the lack of a genuine human concern that characterizes the social-work profession. Efforts to revitalize the community by developing and mobilizing social capital are called for. The present article focuses specifically on the Tin Shui Wai (TSW) North area, a new town that began to be developed in the late 1980s and which is a constituent part of the TSW area within the Yuen Long District in the northwest region of Hong Kong.

### **“New Town” Development – A Hong Kong version of a British Legacy**

The problem of Tin Shui Wai North actually resulted from the Hong Kong government’s “new town” policy, which reached its high point in the 1970s. The policy and its intellectual heritage of new town development can be traced to Hong Kong’s British colonial legacy and the United Kingdom during the post-Second World War years. Immediately after the war, in 1945, the U.K. government established a New Towns Committee, vested with the responsibility for reconstructing postwar London. The committee took a two-pronged approach: it sought to improve housing conditions in overcrowded areas and to reduce the concentration of industry that had resulted in the over-expansion of the metropolis to an unmanageable size. Alongside this decentralization policy, the committee established two guiding principles in planning the new towns, namely self-containment and balanced development for both working and living (Aldridge, 1979, cited in Lai, 2003).

Given that Hong Kong had been governed by the U.K., as a colony, in the period 1942–1997, it is no surprise that new-town development in the 1970s inherited the philosophy and practical imperatives of the U.K. strategy. Specifically, the Hong Kong colonial administration also adopted the abovementioned two guiding principles in its new-town policy. Although Hong Kong was supposed to follow the British example in developing the new towns, Hong Kong’s new-town project differed from the U.K. model in that it mainly catered to the working class, whereas the U.K. model catered primarily to the middle class (Sit, 1979). This was because the Hong Kong government had merged its new-town policy with the public rental housing policy in the early 1970s. Also, there was still no middle class as such in the 1970s, when the Hong Kong economy was only just beginning to prosper. Given that public housing was primarily a kind of welfare provision, a stringent means test served as an effective screening mechanism to ensure that only those genuinely in need would be allocated a public rental housing unit. As a result, there was a high concentration of low-income people on these public rental housing estates. Thus, one of the two principles of new town development—balanced development in terms of a population mix—was not upheld.



But the other principle—self-containment—did not materialize either. Sit (1979) argued that new towns are usually found at remote locations and are only linked by highways or mass transit systems to the urban center. The new towns by themselves cannot provide any incentive to attract sufficient business investment in order to create job opportunities for the residents. As a result, residents have to commute between their homes (in the new town) and their workplace (in the city center). Thus, the new towns cannot be considered “self-contained.” This is also apparent in the case that follows, the Tin Shui Wai North new town.

### **Community Anomie in Tin Shui Wai North resulted from Planning Disaster**

The development of Tin Shui Wai (TSW), Hong Kong’s eighth new town, began in 1987. The government started to construct the first public housing estate in 1992 and a phased population intake began in 2001. According to the government, the overall population of the TSW new town is expected to increase from 258,600 in 2003 to about 291,400 in 2011 (Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai, 2004). However, as described below, there are a host of factors that have led to the problematic development of the northern part of TSW and that have manifested themselves as community anomie.

#### **Lopsided Population Composition leading to Unemployment, Poverty, and Family Problems**

With TSW, the government has repeated its 1970s “public-housing-led” strategy. This has involved moving a population into a designated new town first in the hope that it would subsequently attract retail and personal service industries. The public-housing residents, in a sense, would serve as “pioneers,” laying the foundation for subsequent development. For instance, they were regarded as forming the nucleus of a population that would grow to the “critical mass” of consumers necessary to attract providers of goods and services. The government’s strategy was primarily based on the assumption that the local citizens had a great demand for subsidized rental housing. This is to be understood against the background that, as land and private housing prices and rents in Hong Kong became high compared with those of other countries, citizens on lower incomes would have a strong desire to be allocated public rental housing units. Thus, although the location of TSW is very remote, there were still some public housing applicants who were keen to move there. However, there was still an important difference between applicants from indigenous households and those from households that were largely made up of new immigrants from Mainland China. Because of its remote location, local applicants who could find or afford other solutions to their housing problems usually rejected being allocated accommodation in TSW. In contrast, new migrant families more readily accepted the offer since they desperately needed to reduce their congested living conditions as more new migrants came from the mainland to join their spouses or parents. As a result, since 2002, a

considerable amount of new arrivals have moved into the estates in TSW (HKSAR Government Housing Department, 2006). This disproportionate concentration of new migrants constitutes one of the facets of the repeated failure to develop a “balanced community.” These “newcomers” to the Hong Kong community may have trouble adjusting to the hectic atmosphere of urban Hong Kong in general and the anomic condition of TSW in particular.

The Tin Shui Wai North case again reveals the failure of the “self-containment” approach in terms of its inability to provide sufficient business and employment opportunities. It also reinforces the failure to achieve a balanced population mix. When compared with previous cases of massive public housing development in the urban areas in the 1960s, the Tin Shui Wai North district has few nearby industrial establishments. This basically resulted from the fact that Hong Kong has undergone an economic restructuring with the opening up of China’s economy in the late 1970s, and that industrial factories have “migrated” northward to China under the pervasive trend of globalization. Consequently, few industrialists were establishing factories in Hong Kong when TSW was developed in the late 1990s. Also, due to its remote location, businesses refrained from investing in the area to avoid the high cost of transportation. As a result, business activities are currently minimal and so employment opportunities are scarce.

The high cost of traveling between Tin Shui Wai North and the urban center effectively deters the inhabitants of TSW from finding jobs outside the area. This explains the high unemployment rate within the area. In January 2004, 7,544 people were receiving unemployment welfare from the government (the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, or “CSSA”) in Yuen Long district, which incorporates Tin Shui Wai North. This was the third highest figure among all 18 districts in Hong Kong. Of these 7,544 unemployment welfare recipients, 61 percent were in TSW. In fact, on the six public rental housing estates in Tin Shui Wai North, there were 27,148 units housing 87,620 persons. About 35 percent of the families on these estates were receiving government welfare assistance (Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai, 2004). Many households also cannot afford the already low public housing rent due to poverty; 447 of these households received “rent allowance” from the Housing Department (HKSAR Government Commission on Poverty, 2006). There is also the danger of a “cycle of poverty” forming, as a high proportion of children and young adults live in welfare recipient families: among the CSSA recipients, 36 percent and 29 percent respectively were aged below 10 and in the 10–19 group (HKSAR Government Commission on Poverty, 2005).

To further exacerbate the problem of a high concentration of low socio-economic groups, a “historical accident” occurred that worsened the imbalance of the population “class-mix” in the district. Following the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998, the Hong Kong economy suffered a severe setback. The newly inaugurated Special Administrative Region government had to revise its housing policy in order to salvage the plummeting property market, since the property sector constituted a significant or even pivotal role in Hong Kong’s economy. In order to prevent a further

drop in private housing prices, the government stopped selling the government-built for-sale flats to avoid competing with the private sector. Thus, the government flats in Tin Shui Wai North were converted into public rental housing estates. Consequently, this resulted in a near vacuum of middle-class residents in the area and aggravated the disproportionate volume of low-income public housing residents. As a result, the population profile in Tin Shui Wai North is very lopsided: while 59 percent and 22 percent of the population of the whole of TSW (both South and North) lived in public rental and for-sale housing respectively in May 2004, as high as 86 percent of the population of Tin Shui Wai North lived in public rental housing. Eventually, Tin Shui Wai North became an area characterized by low income or even poverty.

Family problems are also prevalent in the district. Tin Shui Wai has had highest rates of child abuse and spouse battering in the territory since 2004. Local NGOs have found that poor parenting skills, family finance difficulties, poor spousal communication, and unemployment are the four most frequent problems in TSW (Hong Kong Student Aid Society & City University of Hong Kong, 2004; International Social Services (Hong Kong) & Samaritans (Hong Kong), 2003). There is also a considerable number of “age-disparate” couples that were formed when local Hong Kong men marry younger women in Mainland China. These young brides eventually moved to Hong Kong to be with their husbands (Boys and Girls Clubs Association, 2006). The dissimilarity between the social backgrounds of the spouses can lead to conflicts that may eventually cause domestic violence. Two tragic cases have occurred on the public housing estates in TSW in recent years. In 2005, a husband killed his wife and two children and then jumped to his death. In 2007, a woman killed her two daughters before jumping to her death (Mother and daughters, 2004).

Another problem is poor relationships between neighbors. This can be attributed to the fact that the residents who move into the “virgin” land of a new town find themselves deprived of any preexisting personal or organizational networks. They are therefore prone to feeling alienated, estranged, and insecure, and have difficulty developing generalized trust toward the community or specific trust toward their neighbors. Furthermore, in order to house many residents in a limited space, the public housing estates were designed with 40-storey skyscrapers. This has resulted in a high population density. The physical layout and architectural design of the housing blocks are intended to meet the residents’ increased need for privacy, and therefore have the effect of creating physical and social distance. The architectural design of including multiple open accesses to estates has also made the estates more vulnerable to crime. This has increased the residents’ caution toward their neighbors, thus vividly illustrating the problem of a “defended neighborhood” where people become defensive against one another, thus accentuating community anomie (Suttles, 1972).

### **Lack of Community Facilities and Social Services because of Bureaucratic Delays**

With a high concentration of population in Tin Shui Wai there is an enormous demand for public facilities and social services to meet the needs of the residents. However,

due to the rigidity of government bureaucracy, which adheres strictly to planning guidelines, there has been a serious lack of such community facilities and services. It has been the government's established practice of putting people on site first and providing the related services later; the provision of such facilities and services has suffered from a "time lag" (Chow, 1988). The government has justified the delay in its provision of facilities and services by claiming a need to avoid "under-utilization" by the residents and to reduce the government's financial burden. As a result, the Tin Shui Wai North district has been deprived of sorely needed facilities. This is in sharp contrast to the district's southern counterpart, TSW (South), which has some government for-sale estates and private estates housing middle-class residents, and is provided with a park, a sports ground, areas of commercial activity, public and social amenities such as a library, an indoor recreation center, and some shopping centers. Deprived of the much-needed community facilities, and facing high costs of transportation if they wish to travel beyond the community, youngsters have no alternative but to wander about or gather at street corners within the district, a situation that potentially gives rise to delinquency. Residents in general are also frustrated at the lack of facilities and recreational opportunities. As a result, an undesirable physical infrastructure has led to high social costs.

Apart from community facilities, there is also a lack of social services. Bureaucratic rigidity leading to delays in approving the establishment of new social service centers has proved to be a significant obstacle to providing timely services to the residents. Specifically, the government administration has laid down stringent requirements for finding suitable and available premises for welfare organizations. The situation is further complicated by the plurality of government departments involved in regulating various aspects of problems, such as the structural safety and the fire safety aspects of building control and the like. "Buck passing" among various departments may have made coordination among them difficult and time consuming.

Deprived of community facilities and social services, the TSW residents had no alternative to going outside their residential area to seek substitute means of satisfying their needs. But in the main, precisely because of the distant location and the high cost of travel, the residents of Tin Shui Wai North refrained from going outside their area. They were therefore virtually trapped within the area, deprived of jobs, consumption, entertainment opportunities, and community services. As various surveys have revealed (Harmony House, 2004; Hong Kong Chinese YMCA, 2005), TSW North residents had developed the impression that their community was a monotonous and isolated enclave deserted by the greater part of Hong Kong society. It is therefore not surprising to see that there is no sense of community identification. On the contrary, the anomic, eclipsed community depicted by Chicago urban sociologists palpably sprang into existence.

### **A Lesson Unlearned – The Precedent of Tuen Mun in the 1970s**

In fact, the Tin Shui Wai North case resembles or even replicates its predecessor, Tuen Mun, which was developed in the 1970s as the first "experiment" of new town

in the rural area. Local academics later conducted critical studies on Tuen Mun to reveal the failure of the “self-containment” and “balanced development” approach of the then colonial administration (Chan, 1977; Chan, 1998; Chow, 1988). Tin Shui Wai, developed in the 1990s, and Tuen Mun, developed in the 1970s, shared the same problem. They, too, had had inadequate community facilities and social services, an excessive proportion of the population lived on public housing estates, there was a remoteness from places of work; and residents were cut off from social networks in the urban areas. In Tuen Mun, when it was developed, there was also an imbalance of population, with the ratio between public rental housing and private housing being 6.5 to 1 (Chan, 1998). There had actually been a sustained shortage of employment provided in the district: 22 percent in 1981 and 48 percent in 1991 (Chan, 1998, p. 93). Survey findings in 1988 revealed that 56 percent of the respondents found inadequate employment opportunities in Tuen Mun (Chow, 1988). Even after some 30 years of development, only 29 percent of the working population in Tuen Mun found work within the district and more than 70 percent of the working population had to work in other districts (Chan, 1998, p. 64).

Residents were generally quite dissatisfied with the inadequacy of various services: 74 percent and 55 percent respectively found medical and welfare services inadequate. Some 59 percent had adjustment problems when moving into the area (Chow, 1988). As a consequence, family problems such as marital discord, domestic violence, youth delinquency, and illegal gangs were frequently reported. In 2007, Tuen Mun had a population of 500,000; but it recorded 12 percent of Hong Kong’s total cases of child abuse, 6 percent of batter-spouse cases, 9 percent single-parent families, 8 percent drug abusers, 18 percent juvenile offenders, 15 percent young offenders, 8 percent of social security recipients, and 9 percent of unemployed social-security recipients (HKSAR Social Welfare Department, 2008). Thus, it can be postulated that, given the government’s poor planning and implementation, community sentiment could hardly be nurtured in the newly established communities of the new towns. Instead, alienation, a high crime rate, family problems, and community anomie prevailed. All these problems were attributable, in the final analysis, to the government’s “planning disaster” in inadequately attending to the needs of the physical and social infrastructure of the community.

### **Hong Kong People’s Materialistic and Exclusionary Normative Order drains away Community Sentiment**

Community anomie in TSW can also be attributable to the mentality of the people of Hong Kong. Originally, the Hong Kong Chinese people constituted 95 percent of the population of the region, and were characterized as having a collectivist cultural disposition and a predisposition in favor of the communitarian ideals of mutual help and support. However, given the unique historical background of Hong Kong, subtle changes in people’s cultural orientations developed. A considerable portion of the post-Second World War population of Hong Kong is composed of refugees from

Mainland China. A “refugee sentiment” prevailed among these immigrants (Hoadley, 1970), who were merely looking for a means of earning a living without giving much thought to a sense of belonging to Hong Kong. These people were regarded as having a “utilitarian familism” (Lau, 1977) as their normative order. This familism was parochial in the sense that it meant attending only to one’s own immediate familial interests. People became apathetic toward community affairs, not to mention community mutual help (Tam & Yeung, 1994). The economic prosperity that developed from the 1970s drove Hong Kong people to become even more predisposed to the speculative and opportunistic pursuit of immediate economic and pragmatic concerns. Hong Kong people have become virtually the prototype of the *Homo economicus* who embraces a “capitalistic consciousness” (Harvey, 1989). All these factors have laid the foundations for the development of egoistic and materialistic aspirations among the Hong Kong population. Worse still, faced with an economic downturn in the 1990s, the indigenous population had developed a parochialism that was, however, accompanied by a resentment of migrants, whom they thought constituted both a source of competition in the job market and a burden on public welfare funds (Chui, 2004). These tensions are particularly critical in the Tin Shui Wai North community with its high concentration of new migrants from Mainland China, a concentration that has accentuated the feelings of alienation from the community there.

The gloomy picture depicted above vividly portrays the anomie situation of a community as theorized by classical sociologists, who analyzed the attendant problems of eroding human relationships in the transition from a rural to an urban social context. Tin Shui Wai North also mirrored the conditions of “community eclipse” (Stein, 1960) or “loss of community” (Lyon, 1989: 97).

## **Revitalizing Community through better Urban Planning and Social Capital Development**

In order to rescue these eclipsed communities, the significance of “social capital” in revitalizing community spirit and sentiment should be recognized when tackling community problems. Although there are various interpretations and usages of the term, “social capital” can generally be understood as being embodied in the connection between people, social networks, norms of generalized reciprocity, trustworthiness, and civility (Putnam, 2000). It also contributes to developing a civic culture that embraces tolerance and the acceptance of diversity, which, in turn, eventually leads to that social inclusion that is indispensable in an increasingly complex and heterogeneous society. Endowed with social capital, communities can provide people with the social psychological support they need to face the troubles of urban living. If a generalized trust prevails in the community, people can also have a sense of security (Clarke, 1981).

In practice, social capital can be developed in numerous ways, by working on the “hardware” of the urban form and on the “software” of people’s social fabric and cultural dispositions. The hardware of the physical layout of the city or community

serves as the “material base” (Harvey, 1989) that provides the platform or venue for sustaining the processes of human interaction and normative development. In this connection, the concept of “public space” is relevant. Public spaces are venues that enable people to “meet and greet” (Beatley & Manning, 1997) and engage in “place-making” or “city-making” efforts (Frug, 1999). Such spaces can be libraries, post offices, pedestrian sidewalks, atriums, indoor marketplaces, downtown shopping malls, community centers, and a host of similar places (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992). If one focuses specifically on public housing estates in new towns like Tin Shui Wai North, public spaces such as “sitting out areas” might be located in the midst of the buildings. Here, reference can be made to the Singaporean public housing experience where “void decks” are set aside within blocks of buildings to provide residents with communal meeting places (Tan, 1996). In such public spaces, one comes into contact with a variety of people, and this engenders an acceptance or tolerance of diversity. It even develops common interests and sentiments based upon the sharing and usage of the same physical locale. In consequence, people may develop a sense of collective identification to their community. Such strategies can rectify the man-made ‘disaster’ of improper planning and implementation initiated by government in the early stages of development of the community.

Providing the physical infrastructure to bring about people interaction should be accompanied by efforts on the software front to nurture changes in the normative order of people at the societal level. After its inauguration in 1997, the government made efforts to recultivate people’s nationalistic sentiments, and this may contribute to the nurture of a collective identity. The people of Hong Kong should shift their focus from an egocentric “me” to a communitarian “we” (Etzioni, 1993). A reemphasis on collectivity and mutual concern should lead in the positive direction of reducing community alienation. In this respect, civic education can be promoted to nourish people’s sense of collective responsibility to counteract individualistic parochialism. Specifically, volunteerism should be fostered, as this helps to breed altruism, genuine concern, and mutual help among individuals. Non-materialistic pursuits of this kind are particularly pertinent to confronting people’s materialistic aspirations and egocentric concerns. In particular, as revealed in the Tin Shui Wai North case, the new migrants from Mainland China should be better integrated into the host community, which is also made up mainly of ethnic Chinese anyway. Efforts should be made to promote inclusionary sentiments to facilitate the better integration of new immigrants into society (Chui, 2004), in order to reduce the stress and alienation they suffer. In fact, there are some pre-existent rudimentary social networks found in the Tin Shui Wai community. There are residents’ committees in the public rental housing estates, which may provide the infrastructure for promoting neighborliness among the residents. The NGOs situated within or near the community could also be linked up with better coordinating mechanisms in the promotion of networks among residents.

With the concern for combating the widespread poverty in mind, a “community economy” can be developed in the new towns like TSW North, in which small

businesses operate within the framework of “social enterprises.” Such social enterprises can help to create jobs, training, and the provision of services for people within a specific community. They are characterized by ethical values that carry a commitment to building people’s skills in local communities. The profits generated from these small businesses are principally reinvested to achieve their social objectives (Social Enterprise Coalition, 2008). Mutual help networks and programs focusing on the exchange of goods and services among the participants can also be organized. For instance, while a retired barber cuts the hair of the children of a welfare recipient family, the mother of that family helps to cook food for this elderly retiree who may live alone. This kind of activity, apart from meeting the tangible and immediate needs of people, can also nurture the kind of mutuality, trust, and reciprocity that are the manifestations of social capital within a community. In collaboration with an NGO, I helped to start up a mushroom farm in which welfare recipients and new migrant women in the Tin Shui Wai North community were recruited to grow mushrooms for sale. The farm would eventually become a social enterprise operated on a cooperative model for these deprived groups. In a different scenario, we also recruited some unemployed women to form a cooking team to prepare lunch for a school in the community, and another “school support team” to help in school cleaning. The participants in these task groups all gained a sense of the benefits of mutual help and overcame their learned helplessness acquired over a prolonged period of unemployment and welfare dependency. Through accomplishing some specific tasks, they also obtained the feeling of being respected and trusted, instead of being despised by others as being dependent on welfare.

Local NGOs may also help by serving as “carriers” or “change agents” to facilitate the development of neighborliness and community sentiment, and the organization of social networks. In fact, as early as in the 1960s, local NGOs have pioneered the provision of community services and the development of community cohesion in deprived communities like squatter groups, fishermen’s villages, or groups of boat people at typhoon shelters. These NGOs can contribute by identifying community needs, promoting residents’ interaction, cultivating a “we-feeling,” developing grassroots leadership, involving residents in community activities, and promoting welfare services. Community social workers may mobilize volunteers to serve needy clients in the community, like single parents, low-income families, elderly people living alone, and the like. Although the Hong Kong government has already halted its financial support for the setting up of community centers, there should be a serious reconsideration of the proposal for setting up small “community work teams” (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1997) at the neighborhood level. These community organizing “agents” can help local residents’ groups or community organizations to develop and enrich their community life and their collective problem-solving capacity. I reviewed the existing projects to find the following possible strategies, which illustrate the point. Community workers in a neighborhood development project organized some elders into a mutual help group that made regular visits or



phone calls to its members so that the members could provide tangible and intangible support for one another. Women in rural villages and older public housing estates were organized into mutual support groups to assist one another in looking after children and sharing household chores. My personal interview with some Mainland Chinese immigrants served by these community development projects revealed that they had become enthusiastic to serve others and wanted to reciprocate the assistance they had received from the community workers (Chui, 2002). All these show that such community development efforts can truly bring about positive attitude changes and manifestations of behavior that vividly demonstrate the virtues of the social capital thus developed.

## Conclusion

This article reviews the case of Tin Shui Wai North as one of Hong Kong's new towns developed from the late 1990s up to recent years. However, the Hong Kong government has not been able to realize the two core principles of the British legacy in developing new towns—that of “balanced development” and “self-containment.” What was worse, it apparently had not learned the lessons of the development of Tuen Mun in the 1970s in its planning and implementation of the development of Tin Shui Wai North some 20 years later. The same problems of inappropriate planning, rigidity in implementing planning standards, and delayed provision of facilities and services have basically been repeated. Worse still, upon the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China, the newly instated Special Administrative Region government was further hard hit by a “historical accident” of turning housing for middle-income residents to public rental housing during the Asian financial crisis, which further disrupted the original intent of the administration, resulting in another “planning disaster” that led to enormous social costs. Community eclipse and anomie have resulted, to the detriment of the residents of Tin Shui Wai North and even to the detriment of the entire society of Hong Kong at large.

It is argued here that, in addition to rectifying the mistakes in urban planning by reinstating the necessary physical infrastructure and social services in the community, efforts to revitalize the community should also be made. The social work profession may contribute in this endeavor by working on community development programs to nurture social capital that may help to tackle community eclipse and anomie. Such experiences in Hong Kong will probably be relevant to other cities and communities confronted with similar problems of rapid and improperly planned or implemented urbanization. The government and the community should engage in joint efforts to revitalize communities. Although there have been suggestions that the concept of “community” almost belongs to the realms of nostalgia, it is postulated here that community development is actually futuristic in that it can prevent the further worsening of community alienation and eclipse. Social capital helps to nurture positive social norms, engender generalized trust, and develop social networks in communities.

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