

Rethinking Folk Religion in Hong Kong: Social Capital, Civic Community and the State

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Abstract

This paper discusses how folk religion can be a source of social capital formation, which is significant in the building of a civic community and social development. To borrow Michael Woolcock's theory, social capital is defined as a form of embedded and autonomous social relations. The author argues that the potential contribution of folk religion in creating social capital was suppressed in colonial Hong Kong society. Yet, despite the unfavorable political environment, Wong Tai Sin and the Sik Sik Yuen, a famous folk religion and its related religious organization, played a prominent role in charitable, relief, educational, medical and social services. This can be understood as resulting from the positive effects of social capital. The author examines the underlying factors leading to the success of Wong Tai Sin and Sik Sik Yuen, and discusses the opportunities and constraints on Chinese religions in social capital formation in post-colonial Hong Kong.

1. Introduction

In recent years, social capital has become an important topic of discussion in the academic circles of sociology. Sociologists hold that social capital can help build civic communities that encourage trust, reciprocity and participation. Such civic communities can also facilitate economic development. Social organizations, particularly religious organizations, are the source of social capital (Chen and Qiu, 1999; Fukuyama, 2000). In the past, although many scholars discussed how social organizations contribute to the formation of social capital, few explored the relationship between religious organizations and social capital. In Hong Kong, religious

organizations, such as the Christian churches, have been outstanding in their involvement in social services. They have enthusiastically taken part in education, medical and social services in the local community. It is possible to say that their social involvement has been significant in regards to social capital formation. An example of the performance of Chinese religions and their related organizations has been visible in the active social role of Wong Tai Sin (黃大仙) and its management organization, Sik Sik Yuen (耑色園). The potential of Chinese religions, especially folk religions, to create social capital and build a civic community is an important topic that needs to be examined thoroughly. This paper studies how folk religion can help social capital formation using the case of Wong Tai Sin and Sik Sik Yuen.

This paper has four parts. Part 1 discusses the concept of social capital and its relationship to development and religion. Part 2 analyzes the historical and social context of Hong Kong in the colonial period and how it facilitated the social involvement of Christianity and at the same time hampered the potential of Chinese religion. Part 3 examines the social role played by Wong Tai Sin and its management organization Sik Sik Yuen in relief and charitable works, education, medical and social services. The final part discusses the opportunities and constraints of Chinese religion and religious organizations in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region after 1997.

2.Social Capital, Development and Religion

Social capital is a theoretical concept that has attracted considerable attention in sociological circles (Couto, 1999; Dasgupta and Serageldini, 2000; Evans, 1997; Lin, 2000). Sociologists suggest that other than physical capital (i.e., assets that generate income) and human capital (educated, trained and healthy workers), there is also social capital, which is a resource important to social and economic development. In this section three related questions will be discussed: What is social capital? What are the relationships between social capital and development? What are the relationships

between religion and social capital?

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as: “The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” (Bourdieu, 1985:248-249). In this definition, Bourdieu holds that social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of other benefits. Bourdieu's definition makes clear that social capital can be divided into two elements: firstly, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and secondly, the amount and quality of those resources (Portes, 1998:3-4).

A second contemporary source of social research related to social capital is the work of Robert Putnam. Putnam suggests that social capital refers to "features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action." (Putnam, 1993:167) Trust is an essential component of social capital. Trust lubricates cooperation. The greater the level of trust within a community, the greater the likelihood of cooperation. Cooperation itself breeds trust. The accumulation of social capital can sustain economic dynamism and government performance (Putnam, 1993:170-171).

In virtually all forms of traditional culture, social groups such as tribes, clans, village associations, religious sects and the like, are based on shared norms that they use to achieve cooperative ends. The literature on development has not, as a general rule, found social capital in this form to be an asset; it is much more typically regarded as a liability. Economic modernization was seen as antithetical to traditional culture and social organization, and would either wipe them away or else itself be blocked by forces of traditionalism. Why should this be so, if social capital is genuinely a form of capital? (Fukuyama, 2000:4)

Mark Granovetter provides an explanation and new understanding of the nature of social capital. Granovetter suggests that all economic action was inherently enmeshed in social relations of one configuration or another and that development essentially brought about a change in the kind, not degree, of 'embeddedness'. Different forms of embeddedness, for example, social ties, cultural practices and political contexts, had a powerful effect on shaping the types of opportunities and constraints individuals faced as they sought economic achievement. Granovetter holds that the cost of embeddedness in a given network lies on the constraints imposed on the successful members who attempt to make the transition to membership larger, more extensive, and sophisticated -- an exchange network coordinated by formal institutions and the rule of law. To overcome the costs of embeddedness, sociologists identify that the presence or absence of a complementary set of autonomous social ties is crucial to the developmental outcomes of the individuals involved.

By the mid-1990s, scholars working in the field of both ethnic entrepreneurship and comparative institutionalism had explicitly identified embedded and autonomous social relations as distinct forms of social capital. Working in this direction, Michael Woolcock formulates a theoretical framework of social capital incorporating the concepts of embeddedness and autonomy at both the micro and macro level. Embeddedness at the micro level refers to intra-community ties, whereas at the macro level refers to state-society relations; autonomy at the micro level refers to extra-community networks, while at the macro level it refers to institutional capacity and credibility (Woolcock, 1998:164).

The theoretical framework has important implications on economic development in a given environment. To foster better economic performance, policy makers should invest in social capital formation. In this regard, Woolcock further explores different levels, dimensions and combinations of social capital at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, embeddedness refers to integration, and autonomy refers to linkage. At the macro level, embeddedness refers to

synergy (i.e., state-society relations), while autonomy refers to organizational integrity (i.e., institutional coherence, competence and capacity) (Woolcock, 1998:168).

The idea of integration is taken from Durkheim's notions of mechanical and organic solidarity, whereas linkage is from Simmel, who suggests that poor communities need to generate social ties extending beyond their primordial groups if long-term development outcomes are to be achieved. The idea of synergy is borrowed from Weber and was originally defined as the "ties that connect citizens and public officials across the public-private divide", and now is expanded to refer more generally to the social relationships between representatives of formal organizations. Organizational integrity consists of two key organizational dimensions: the internal structures that establish and perpetuate capacity and credibility, and the external ties to clients and constituents. Now it is suggested that both the state and society (i.e., organizations) should offer a clear vision of the internal structure and the character of state-society relations (Woolcock, 1998:168, 170).

An important question related to social capital formation is: Where does social capital come from? Alejandro Portes argues that one of the sources of social capital is religion, and he refers to Durkheim's theory of social integration and the sanctioning capacity of group rituals (Portes, 1998:8). Francis Fukuyama also argues that the world's major religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, or large cultural systems like Confucianism, are important sources through which social capital is generated. He holds: "They (norms) are transmitted from one generation to the next through a process of socialization that involves much more habit than reason. Path dependence -- another word for tradition -- means that norms that are clearly socially sub-optimal can persist for a long time." (Fukuyama, 2000:13-14) A related question is: How can we increase the stock of social capital? Fukuyama holds that social capital is a byproduct of religion, tradition, shared historical experience and other factors that lie outside the control of government. Public policy can be aware of already existing forms of social capital,

but it cannot duplicate the effect of religion as a source of shared values. Nevertheless, he contends that a potential source of social capital comes from civil society which consists of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Religion, through voluntary associations, is effective in promoting civil society. However, he also notes that not all forms of religion are positive from the standpoint of social capital. "Sectarianism can breed intolerance, hatred, and violence. But historically religion has also been one of the most important sources of culture and is likely to remain so in the future." (Fukuyama, 2000:16)

3.The Historical and Social Context

Historically, Chinese religions and social services have been closely related. Chinese religious organizations have played an important social role because they are local bodies that provide relief and welfare services to the community. For example, the doctrine of Taoism stresses respecting the Tao and cultivating virtue, and Taoist disciples are required to practice nei-gong (內功 internal exercises) and wai-gong (外功 external exercises). To practice nei-gong, one has to learn yang-sheng (養生 to conserve one's vital powers) and wu-wei (無爲 non-action). To practice wai-gong, one has to learn bu-shan (佈善 to do good works) and hang-ren (行仁 to act with benevolence). The teaching of the latter doctrine has great implications on the theory and practice of social welfare services (Yan, 1985:191).

Buddhist doctrine also contains religious teaching concerning relief, charitable work and social services. In Buddhist doctrine, bu-shi (布施) and ci-bei (慈悲) are two important ideas related to social involvement. According to the Buddhist Scripture Da-Chen Yi-Zhang (大乘義章), bu-shi means "to share one's property with others is called bu, to do good deeds for others is called shi." (以己財事分與他，名爲布。己惠人，名之爲施。) Whereas in Da-Zhi Du-Lun (大智度論), ci-bei means "great ci is to share happiness with all people, great bei is to help all people to be liberated from suffering."

(大慈與一切眾生樂，大悲拔一切眾生苦。) Bu-shi and ci-bei can be seen as the theological foundation of Buddhism in providing social services (Chow, 1985: 150-151). To practice the Buddhist teaching, a believer has to cultivate six du (六度 six principles of measure) and four wu-liang-xin (四無量心 four measureless hearts). The six du means bu-shi (布施 to give charitably), chi-jie (持戒 to hold the Buddhist discipline), ren-ru (忍辱 to endure humiliation), jing-jin (精進 to improve constantly), chan-ding (禪定 to contemplate intensely) and po-ye (般若 i.e., zhi-hui 智慧 wisdom). The four wu-liang-xin are ci (慈 kindness), bei (悲 compassion), xi (喜 happiness), she (捨 charity), which are the extreme conditions of four attitudes. The above categories contain two kinds of teaching: the first involves the individual and inspires wisdom and the practice of liberation from suffering; the second involves social interaction and encourages sympathy and service of others. What is worth noticing is that, the idea of she-ji wei-ren (捨己爲人 sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of others) in Buddhism is not only a kind of spirituality, but also the means to attain an end in practicing Buddhist faith (Ding, 1982:164).

In Chinese history, Buddhism developed a unique system of social welfare organizations. During the Tang Dynasty, there were two forms of social welfare organizations, bei-tian yuan (悲田院) and yang-bing fang (養病坊). The essential characteristic of the organization was that both were financially supported by the government and managed by Buddhist monks or nuns. Bei-tian yuan was for orphans, elderly and the poor, whereas yang-bing fang was for the sick. During the Song Dynasty, there were an-ji fang (安濟坊) and ju-yang yuan (居養院). The management model and function of these groups reflected the culture and views of the Tang Dynasty. In the rural setting, ju-yang yuan was always established in a Buddhist monastery (Ding, 1982:162). In the twentieth century, Buddhist monasteries established the system of zhai-tang (齋堂). Zhai-tang was originally a place of meditation for Buddhist believers but later it became home for single elderly. Those who wanted to live in a zhai-tang had to pay a lump sum to reserve a place and once

accepted he or she were able to enjoy free meals and lodging until they died (Yan, 1985: 192).

Hong Kong's colonial history had an enormous influence on the social role of religion. The British-run colonial government had no long-term development blueprint for Hong Kong society. Before 1950s, Chinese people who needed help had to rely primarily on the family. Beyond the family were sib or territorial organizations such as zong-qin hui (宗親會) or tong-xiang hui (同鄉會). There were also Chinese social organizations such as Po Leung Kuk (保良局). The overseas Christian churches had established bodies to provide education, medical and social services. Due to a shortage of income, the services they provided were very limited. The 1950s, however, marked a turning point for developing social services in Hong Kong.

In 1949, a huge number of refugees began to flood into Hong Kong after the Communist Party assumed control over mainland China. Census figures show that there had been 1.639 million people in Hong Kong before the Japanese occupation in 1941. The population dropped to 600,000 in 1945. In the years after the war, however, almost 100,000 people began crossing the border into Hong Kong from mainland China every month. By 1951, Hong Kong's population had reached 2 million (Chen and Guo, 1998:248). The huge number of refugees created urgent demands for housing, education, employment and medical and social welfare services.

Other than social problems, Hong Kong became a place of conflict between Kuomintang (KMT) or Nationalist and Communist forces, which eventually resulted in riots in the 1950s to 1960s. On 10 October 1956, the supporters of the Nationalists attacked those newspaper companies, schools and labor unions connected to the Communists. This became known as the "Kowloon Riots". The Communists instigated riots to undermine the colonial regime. Most important were the troubles that occurred in 1966. On 4 April 1966, the Hong Kong Star Ferry increased its fares by five cents. This triggered large-scale protests across Hong Kong. The report commissioned by the Hong Kong government pointed out that the

turbulence was partly due to the government's negligence of social welfare and the livelihood of the lower social strata (Hong Kong Government, 1967). Another riot took place on 6 May 1967 following a workers' union strike at a plastic flower factory in San Po Kong. The strike triggered direct confrontation between the union, which was connected to the Communists, and the police force. The turbulence in 1966 showed that a new generation of Chinese born in Hong Kong had strong grievances towards the colonial government and were therefore more likely to take action to challenge the authority of the government.

For the colonial government, the 1950s and 60s were full of uncertainty and one crisis followed another. It had to face social problems created by the influx of refugees, as well as political unrest instigated by Nationalist and Communist forces. The political unrest was a particularly sensitive issue. The government was aware that the two forces, especially the pro-Communists backed by Beijing, could make use of the social problems to induce an anti-colonial political movement in Hong Kong. Therefore, it needed to solve the social problems in order to maintain social stability and at the same time weaken the rising political influence of the Nationalist and Communist forces. By doing so, the colonial government would be able to reassert its control over Hong Kong.

This turbulent social environment provided the Chinese religious organizations and the Christian churches with new opportunities. Compared to the Chinese religious organizations, however, the Christian churches had an ideological affinity with the colonial government. For example, before 1981 the Anglican bishop of Hong Kong had been a British citizen, and before 1997, the Anglican Church in Hong Kong and Macau was under the direct supervision of the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. The Anglican bishop ranked fifth on the government's protocol list, following only the Governor, the Chief Justice, the Chief Secretary and the Commander-General.

The involvement of the Christian churches in education is also

illuminative. In the 1950s, there were insufficient places in secondary and primary schools due to the influx of refugees. Moreover, Nationalist and Communist forces had penetrated the schools. In March 1949, an internal government document reported that thirty-four secondary schools were de facto under the control of pro-Communist forces and that many of the staff, teachers and students in thirty-two urban secondary schools supported the Communist cause. Twenty-four secondary schools were under the control or influence of the Communist (Sweeting, 1993:201). The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Alexander Grantham, at that time was concerned about the infiltration of pro-Communist forces in schools and the indoctrination of students. The Board of Education of the Education Department had discussed the problem. Anglican Bishop Ronald O. Hall was a member of the board. On 16 September 1950, Bishop Hall wrote a private letter to the Secretary of the Board of Education making the following suggestion:

In view of what was said by two members of the Board who do not share my Christian faith, I could not say publicly that my main concern is with the use of Christian Churches by subsidy in primary education. The Government both in the United Kingdom and its colonial policy recognizes that by-in-large only religion can resist Communism and that non-religious secular primary education on a large scale will produce an atheistic proletariat as prepared ground for Communism sowing. I very much hope that the Roman Catholic Church will, with encouragement from the Department, strengthen and enlarge their primary school work.¹

Two points in particular merit attention in Hall's letter. Firstly, he stated that the British government's colonial policy suggested that "only religion can resist Communism". The word "religion" here did not mean all religions but Christianity. This is particularly noticeable because even though he was an Anglican bishop he saw the Roman Catholic Church as an ally in this cause. Secondly, he stated pointedly that "non-religious, secular primary education on a large scale will produce an atheistic proletariat as prepared ground for

Communism sowing". Here it is possible to hypothesize that the colonial regime had deliberately distanced itself from Chinese religious organizations in the politically sensitive period of the 1950s and 60s due to concern about possible Communist infiltration of Chinese organizations. The situation was unfavorable for Chinese religious organizations, in particular those that intended to take part in education work or provide social services in Hong Kong.

Ronald Hall's suggestion was noted and accepted by the Secretary of the Board of Education.² From the 1950s, the Anglican Church's involvement in secondary and primary education expanded rapidly.³ In fact, the Anglican Church's development in education was also the success story of Christianity in Hong Kong. Although Christians represented only 10 percent of the total population (5 percent Catholics and 5 percent Protestant), Christians played an influential role in education, medical and social services in Hong Kong. According to 1998 statistics, the Catholic Church runs 322 schools and kindergartens, 6 hospitals, 12 clinics and 14 social service organizations. The 14 social service organizations run some 25 homes for the aged, 22 homes for the handicapped and many self-help clubs and associations. The Protestant churches run 3 tertiary institutions, 144 secondary schools, 192 primary schools, 273 kindergartens, 166 nurseries, 6 hospitals, 18 clinics, 59 social service organizations in 1997. Among the 59 organizations, there are 227 community, family service and youth centers, 74 day care centers, 17 children's homes, 35 homes for the elderly, 106 centers for the elderly, 2 schools for the deaf and 1 for the blind and 47 training centers for the mentally handicapped and disabled.⁴ Compared to the Christian churches, Chinese religious organizations also provided education, medical and social services, but the quantity was far less.⁵ Shi Jiao-guang, Chairperson of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association, expressed his discontent concerning the colonial government's bias in a Buddhist journal at the time of the handover of Hong Kong to the Chinese sovereignty in July 1997:

The colonial government, under the rule of the British imperialists, before [1997], discriminated against Buddhism, which did not

have an equal status with the “churches”, which were backed by the British. The churches are allowed to celebrate their festivals, but Buddhists do not have even one public holiday [to celebrate their festivals]. This is extremely unfair. Many Buddhist disciples are unhappy about it. I believe that all the unequal phenomena will naturally be solved after the handover of Hong Kong (Shi, 1997:3-4).

Although Shi’s discontent was caused largely by the fact that Buddhists were not allocated a public holiday to celebrate any of their major feasts, his letter alludes to this as only one of many “unequal phenomena”. Shi’s grievances reflected the general feeling of Chinese religious personnel in Hong Kong.

Religious faiths, organizations and communities are an important source of social capital that can be a vital developmental force. The contribution of the Christian churches in Hong Kong society provides evidence of this. However, due to the constraints of the colonial situation, Chinese religious organizations did not have an equal opportunity to take part in such development, although they have the same potential in regards to social capital. From the Woolcock’s perspective -- putting aside the variable of organizational integrity -- it is possible to see that state-society relations were a crucial factor in explaining the discrepancy between the Christian churches and the Chinese religious organizations in the development of Hong Kong. It is because there was synergy between the colonial government and the Christian churches that Christianity was able to become a significant source of social capital promoting the development of Hong Kong. Due to insufficient synergy, the Chinese religious organizations were weak in social involvement and this resulted in a low degree of participation in that development. The variables in regards to organizational integrity, in particular folk religion, shall be discussed in detail in the next section.

4.Folk religion and Civic Community

Folk religion is an inseparable part of everyday life in Hong Kong.

Many scholars have conducted research into folk religion in Hong Kong over the past 30 years. In the rural setting, David Faure's (1986) study holds that folk religion is a kind of representation of the territory, and functions in integrating traditional organizations such as clan and lineage. James Watson's (1985) study of the Tian Hou (Empress of Heaven) in Yuen Long draws attention to how the state used the deities of folk religion as political symbols to express sovereignty, and how traditional clans used deities and religious festivals to strengthen their power over the local community. Choi Chi-cheung (1993, 1995, 2000) and Liu Tik-sang (2000) studied the Jiao festival and the Tian Hou respectively, and explored their relationship with the local community and traditional organizations. In the urban setting, Baruch Boxer's (1968) study of feng shui in Tsuen Wan suggests that popular religious beliefs can be a facilitating force in urbanization. John Myers's (1968) study of folk religion in Kwun Tong holds that the dominant force of ancestral worship and folk religion in Hong Kong were undermined by the process of industrialization. Graeme Lang and Lars Ragvald's (1988, 1993) study of Wong Tai Sin, the most popular deity in Hong Kong, suggests that the upward mobility of the deity was the result of a variety of historical and social factors.

Most scholars of folk religion in Hong Kong have noted the intimate relationship between folk religion and traditional organizations in local communities. However, scholars have seldom investigated the social role of folk religion in the urban setting, as well as the various forms of deity worship and their related religious organizations. The Tian Hou and Wong Tai Sin are powerful folk religions in Hong Kong, but their discrepancy in regards to social involvement in the process of urbanization has been salient. Liu Tik-seng notes that Tian Hou has been closely related to the development of Hong Kong society. Tian Hou is significant in identity building among local and ethnic groups, as well as in the formation of local organizations (Liu, 2000:99-121). However, the local groups and organizations in Liu's study are basically traditional rural communities, not modern urban communities. Compared with Tian Hou, Wong Tai Sin and its social involvement is closer to the concept of community development

today.

Wong Tai Sin and its managing organization Sik Sik Yuen has played a major role in Hong Kong's social development. It runs 5 secondary schools, 4 primary schools, 6 kindergartens, 1 educational center in natural environment care and astronomy, 1 medical center (providing both Chinese and Western treatment and medication, dental service facilities and physical therapy), 19 social service organizations, including 5 homes for the elderly, 11 social service and youth centers and 3 nurseries in 2000.⁶ Two questions are raised when considering the outstanding social role of Wong Tai Sin: firstly, as one of the many folk religions in Hong Kong, how was Wong Tai Sin able to play such a significant social role compared to other deities? Secondly, as a Chinese folk religion, how was Wong Tai Sin able to become so socially involved, despite the unfavorable political environment of the colonial period? The answers to these two questions can provide understanding into the uniqueness of Wong Tai Sin. It also provides a clue to solve the following puzzle: How was Chinese folk religion able to become a source of social capital facilitating social development? These questions will be discussed using Woolcock's theoretical framework of social capital, particularly the variables of organizational integrity and state-society synergy.

Organizational integrity

With regard to organizational integrity, Sik Sik Yuen and Huang Yun-tian (黃允畋, 1920-1997), Chairperson in the Board of Directors of Sik Sik Yuen, were the key factors contributing to the social involvement of Wong Tai Sin. Wong Tai Sin originated in Jin-hua in Zhejiang province during the Jin Dynasty, and was revived in Guangdong by a group of intellectuals who engaged in fu-ji (扶箕 spirit-writing) activity in the 19th century. It was the Taoist Liang Ren-an (梁仁菴) who brought Wong Tai Sin from Guangdong to Hong Kong in 1915. Wong Tai Sin is a deity of Taoism who was disseminated in the form of a Taoist shrine (dao tan 道壇). The essential doctrine of Wong Tai Sin is "pu-ji quan-shan" (普濟勸善) -- literally "pu-ji" means to do deliverance universally and "quan-shan"

means to exhort beneficence. The activity of Wong Tai Sin in the early period in Hong Kong was to provide medical instruction and divination through spirit-writing, and the former was further developed into a medical center, which has been providing free medical service and medication from 1924 until today. Sik Sik Yuen was established in 1921. Its main functions were to organize jiao hui (醮會), to provide places for the spirits of deceased relatives, and the yu-lan festival (盂蘭勝會) (Wu, 1997:49-55). 1956 was an important year for Wong Tai Sin and Sik Sik Yuen. That year, Huang Yun-tian assumed the position of chairperson in the Board of Directors of Sik Sik Yuen. As Director he radically reformed the structure of Sik Sik Yuen and turned the traditional faith and organizing body into a modernized religion.

As for religious doctrine, the essential teaching of Wong Tai Sin is “pu-ji quan-shan”. Before, 1956, the Taoists and core members of Sik Sik Yuen believed that the mission of Wong Tai Sin should be focused primarily on religious activity (quan-shan). They felt that Wong Tai Sin's social activities (pu-ji) should not override its religious activities. Huang Yun-tian held that pu-ji and quan-shan were equally important. He argued that since the donations to Wong Tai Sin were from Hong Kong's citizens, Sik Sik Yuen should use the money to provide social services to the people of Hong Kong. Huang's interpretation of pu-ji became the theological foundation on which Sik Sik Yuen's social involvement was built. From 1963, Sik Sik Yuen practiced the principle of san-jiao he-liu (三教合流 three religions in convergence), which means that in addition to worshipping the Taoist deity Wong Tai Sin, the deities of Confucianism and Buddhism were also worshipped in the Wong Tai Sin temple.⁷ Huang took part in Confucianist and Buddhist activities, and he was the honorary President of the Hong Kong Confucian School and Deputy Director of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association. The change of doctrinal interpretation and principle greatly expanded the realm of the religious activities of Wong Tai Sin, and Sik Sik Yuen became an inclusive organization of Taoism in Hong Kong.

The organizational reform of Sik Sik Yuen was in full swing after

1956. Before 1956, Wong Tai Sin temple was virtually a private Taoist shrine. In April 1956, Wong Tai Sin temple was in crisis due to an announcement by the government that it intended to reclaim the land on which the temple stood for the construction of public housing blocks (Lang and Ragvald, 1994:63-64). Huang Yun-tian was a successful real estate businessman and he was also the Principal Director of the Donghua Hospital Group (東華三院).⁸ He proposed that the Sik Sik Yuen establish an organizational relationship with the Donghua Hospital Group. The former would charge 10 cents admission fee at the gate and all admission fees would go to the Donghua Hospital Group, which would set up an educational fund. Through the proposal, Huang and several local Chinese community leaders persuaded the government to withdraw the order to reclaim the land. After five months, the government agreed to withdraw the order, and the Wong Tai Sin temple was subsequently opened to the public (Wu, 1997:59-62). The incident merits attention in the following aspects. Firstly, the incident turned the Wong Tai Sin temple from a private Taoist shrine to a public temple for worshippers and resulted in its alliance with a reputable Chinese organization. Secondly, the Wong Tai Sin temple directed part of the donations from worshippers to an educational fund, which was an important step towards social involvement in Hong Kong. Thirdly, the leader of Sik Sik Yuen was capable of persuading the government to change its policy.

Other reforms within Sik Sik Yuen included: the re-registration of Taoist membership in 1956; the establishment of a “Conservative and Development Fund Committee” in 1959; the organization of a “Committee on Education” and an application to the government for permission to build schools in 1960; and finally, the official registration of the body as a social welfare organization in 1956. Following this period, all policies and decisions were made by a Board of Directors elected by the members of Sik Sik Yuen. In 1984, Huang Yun-tian accepted a proposal by the Chinese Temple Committee that six appointed Directors be added to the board. These included the chairperson of the Donghua Hospital Group, the Administrative Secretary of Wong Tai Sin district, the Administrative

Secretary of the Chinese Temple Committee and three members from the educational, financial and professional sectors. In 1985, the Board of Directors further established five working groups in charge of finance and development; personnel and administration; education; medical and social services and religious matters. The groups were responsible for policy making, organizing activities and preparing the budget (Wu, 1997:66-77). What is worth noticing is that in 1960 Huang changed the way of directors of the board would be chosen. Before 1960, the appointment of directors of the board was decided by way of bei-bo (杯卜, a method of divination). From the perspective of management today, bei-bo is not a desirable method of selection. The probability is high that bei-bo would result in an unstable combination of personnel on the board and weaken the process of policy making and implementation of organizational goals. After 1960, Huang abandoned the way of bei-bo and replaced it with an election system (Lang and Ragvald, 1988:7). Elections stabilized the appointment of personnel and at the same time increased the accountability of directors.

The above organizational reforms merit attention in the following aspects: Firstly, when Huang Yun-tian changed the system of appointment in 1960, seven senior directors left the board. At the same time, new directors joined the board and became supporters of Huang's policy and views. A new Sik Sik Yuen leadership gradually emerged after 1960.⁹ Secondly, Huang accepted a suggestion from the Chinese Temple Committee to add six new directors to the board. The six new directors came from various social and professional backgrounds, which made the board more pluralistic. The new combination was effective in digesting information and drawing up policy responsive to the needs of society. For example, as a director of the board the Administrative Secretary from Wong Tai Sin district was able to help the board grapple with the thinking and policies of the government. The board's new director in charge of education was able to provide professional information on building schools and education related issues. Thirdly, the policy and decision making process regarding Sik Sik Yuen's social involvement became more professional. There were five working groups established in 1985.

More professional input and policy making regarding education, medical and social services greatly helped Sik Sik Yuen expand its social involvement in Hong Kong.

State-society synergy

In addition to organizational integrity, state-society synergy was also an important factor through which Sik Sik Yuen managed to overcome many difficulties and carry out its mission to become more socially involved. Huang Yun-tian was successful at building a relationship between Sik Sik Yuen and the Hong Kong government. The 1956 attempt by the government to reclaim the land on which the temple is built provides insight into Huang's social status and connections because he was able to persuade the government to change its' policy. Huang wielded influence among both the colonial and mainland Chinese governments. In Hong Kong, he was a unofficial Justice of the Peace and was awarded the MBE and OBE medals by the British government. He was an appointed member of the District Board in Wong Tai Sin (1985-1994). In mainland China, he was a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political and Consultative Conference, a member of the Basic Law Consultative Committee and an Honorary Citizen of the city Fu Shan and Nan Hai in mainland China. From the above titles, we can see that Huang was influential both in the political and the religious realms. Using Woolcock's theory of social capital, it is possible to say that at the micro level Huang not only had integration, but also linkage.

After 1956, Sik Sik Yuen became deeply involved in relief and charitable works. For example, Sik Sik Yuen gave HK\$40,000 to help the victims of floods in Yuen Long, a fire at Shan Kuk Mountain and a typhoon in Hong Kong and Kowloon in 1960. Following Typhoon Wendy in 1962, Sik Sik Yuen donated HK\$5,000 in relief aid. Following a fire at Shek Wu Market in 1963 the representatives of Sik Sik Yuen brought donations and clothes to the victims. The organization donated HK\$3,000 to the victims of a fire in West Tai Hang in Kowloon in 1969. When Typhoon Lucy caused serious

damage in August 1971, Sik Sik Yuen donated HK\$10,000 to help relief work.

The costs of providing free Chinese medical services and medicine, and the charitable funds donated by Sik Sik Yuen were huge. Sik Sik Yuen gave 62,100 packs of Chinese medicine to the needy, and donated HK\$58,700 towards relief work in 1956. The amount increased to 143,500 packs of Chinese medicine and aid donations of HK\$154,100 in 1960; 167,500 packs of medicine and HK\$93,400 in 1965; 163,500 packs of medicine and donations of HK\$210,0400 in 1970 and 174,300 packs of medicine and donations of HK\$888,400 in 1975. The organization's outstanding efforts at providing relief aid, medical service and charitable work boosted Sik Sik Yuen's reputation.¹⁰

After 1956, Sik Sik Yuen cooperated with government in education and social services. In 1960, it established a Committee on Education, with Huang as chairperson. Later, it submitted an application to the government for land and an education subsidy. In 1962, the government's Education Department approved Sik Sik Yuen's application. Construction of the first secondary school to be run by Sik Sik Yuen began in 1966, and the Chief Secretary for Chinese Community Affairs took part in the ceremony of construction of Ke Li Secondary School (可立中學). Construction was completed in August 1969 at a cost of HK\$1,625,800. The government paid the majority of the cost, HK\$1,146,800, but Sik Sik Yuen was able to donate about HK\$480,000. That same year, Sik Sik Yuen submitted another application to run one secondary and one primary school in response to a call from the government for help in expanding secondary and primary education. The government allocated a plot of land measuring 73,300 square feet to Sik Sik Yuen in the Kwai Chung district for the building of a secondary school -- Ke Feng Secondary School (可風中學). The government also covered 80 percent of the school's construction expenses. The government then handed over to Sik Sik Yuen a six-story building in Yau Tong district for use as a primary school -- Ke Zheng Primary School (可正小學). The Acting Assistant Secretary of Education

took part in the inauguration ceremony of the primary school in June 1971. Construction work on another secondary school began in December 1971, and the Deputy Secretary of Education took part in the ceremony of construction of Ke Feng Secondary School.

In 1976, the Board of Directors endorsed a plan to provide social services to the elderly, and Sik Sik Yuen bought a plot of land in Clear Water Bay on which to build a home for the elderly -- Ke Jing Nursing Home for the Elderly (可敬護理安老院). Construction work began in 1978, and the Secretary of the Social Welfare Department took part in the ceremony of construction. The cost of building the home for the elderly was HK\$3,600,000. The Hong Kong Lottery Fund supported the service by donating HK\$1 million to the plan, and the rest was covered by Sik Sik Yuen. The home for the elderly could accommodate 96 people. In addition to the income paid by the elderly and the subsidy from the Social Welfare Department, Sik Sik Yuen had to spend at least HK\$200,000 a month in order to provide and maintain regular services.¹¹

From the above it is possible to see that Sik Sik Yuen was very active in education and social services after 1956. Sik Sik Yuen's social involvement earned it public credibility and gradually the trust and support of the government. The latter is particularly important. Indication of the good relationship between Sik Sik Yuen and the government can be seen in the huge plots of land granted to Sik Sik Yuen for further development in 1967, 1982 and 1986 respectively (Chung, 2000:22). Government officials also took part in various Sik Sik Yuen ceremonies and social activities. This was a sign of Sik Sik Yuen's increasing political legitimacy. When construction work on the new Wong Tai Sin temple was completed in 1973, the Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, took part in the inauguration ceremony, a reflection of the close relationship between Sik Sik Yuen and the government. It is this kind of state-society synergy that makes Wong Tai Sin stand out from other folk religions. It also enabled Sik Sik Yuen to become a source of social capital contributing to the development of Hong Kong society.

5. Discussion: Opportunities and Constraints of Chinese Religious Organizations in the Hong Kong SAR

In short, this paper discusses the social role of folk religion and religious organizations in Hong Kong from the perspective of social capital. I argue that religion and religious organizations, no matter whether the Christian churches or Chinese religions and their related organizations, are an important source of social capital. However, two conditions determine whether religion and religious organizations can become facilitators of social capital: organizational integrity and state-society synergy. In other words, religion and religious organizations do not necessarily result in social capital formation. During Hong Kong's colonial period, Christianity and the Christian churches were in a better position to take part in education, medical and social services than Chinese religions and their related organizations due to the political environment. Nevertheless, Wong Tai Sin and its organization, Sik Sik Yuen, became very active in society and as a result provides proof that Chinese religions can also be a source of social capital. Organizational integrity and state-society synergy were the underlying factors allowing Wong Tai Sin to differentiate itself from other popular Chinese religions.

The case of Wong Tai Sin and Sik Sik Yuen provides ample material for discussions on the opportunities and limitations facing Chinese religions and their related organizations becoming facilitators of social capital. It is possible to say that Chinese religions and religious organizations should now be able to assume the same social role as the Christian churches achieved in the colonial period. Be that as it may, Chinese religions and religious organizations could be a potential force helping in social capital formation and development. The political environment of Hong Kong after 1997 has favored Chinese religions. This can be discerned from the increased interaction between the government and the leadership of various Chinese religions, and the support given to the government from Chinese religious organizations.¹² In theory, the hand-over of Hong Kong to China in 1997 should improve state-society synergy and provide Chinese religious organizations with more opportunities to

take part in education, medical and social services.

In reality, there are many limitations on Chinese religions and religious organizations that may not make it easily for them to assume an active social role. Firstly, many Chinese religious organizations remain rather traditional, and a modernization process could take a long time. Nan Lin (2000:7) in his study of social organizations in Taiwan holds that traditional local groups such as temple associations do not show the effect of social capital in his quantitative analysis. In other words, even though there is a favorable environment allowing for improved state-society synergy, Chinese religious organizations may not seize the new opportunities provided due to their own structural limitations.

Secondly, while state-society synergy between the government and social organizations is an important factor contributing to social capital formation, if an organization loses its autonomy in the process of interaction with the government, state-society synergy cannot function. The study of Chen Jian-min and Qiu Hai-xiong (1999) shows that “vertical official relations” and “horizontal official relations” exist in social organizations in Guangzhou in mainland China. “Vertical official relations” means that officials in charge of the same area of social activity took part in the management committee of the social organization. “Horizontal official relations” means that officials in charge of another area of social activity took part in the management committee of a social organization. They find that many social organizations are ready to give up their autonomy due to the fact that the cadres of Communist Party still hold real power, resources and connections. As such, social organizations are the extension of state bureaucratic power. The result is that social organizations are unable to form civic communities or social capital. The situation in mainland China is significant for Chinese religious organizations in Hong Kong. It shows that religious organizations must assert their independent integrity in the process of interaction with the government, otherwise it will undermine state-society synergy and weaken their ability to form social capital.

Notes

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1. "The Letter of Bishop R.O. Hall, Bishop of Hong Kong and South China to the Secretary, Board of Education, 16th September, 1950." Hong Kong Record Series 147 2/2(1), 119 Hong Kong Public Records Office.

2. See "Letter of Secretary of Board of Education to Rt. Rev. R.O. Hall, the Bishop of Hong Kong." Hong Kong Record Series 147 2/2(1), 120, Hong Kong Public Records Office.

3. The Anglican Church ran 46 primary schools from the year 1851 to 1974. Among the 45 schools, 31 were established during the years 1950 to 1974, accounting for 67% of the total number. The Anglican Church set up 22 secondary schools over the period of 1851 to 1974. Among the 22 schools, 14 were established during the period 1950 to 1974, accounting for 64% of the total number. See *The Diocese of Hong Kong and Macau -- 1984-1974: A Brief History and the 1974 List of Churches, Primary and Secondary Schools, and Social Welfare Centers* (Hong Kong: Diocesan Office, 1974), pp. 16-21.

4. Information Services Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government, *Hong Kong 1999* (Hong Kong: The Printing Department, 1999), pp. 355-357.

5. In 1977, Buddhist organizations ran 2 tertiary institutions, 17 secondary schools, 28 primary schools and 7 kindergartens. Together the institutions had a total of 70,000 students. In the same year, the Catholic Church ran 310 schools with 274,000 students, the

Protestant churches ran 2 tertiary institutions, 130 secondary schools, and 250 primary schools. See The Editorial Board of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association. 1978. The Hong Kong Buddhist Journal (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Association), pp. 2, 64-64. Government Information Services. 1978. Hong Kong 1978: A Review of 1977 (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1978), pp. 179-180.

6. "Sik Sik Yuen." (2000) Website: <http://www.siksikyuen.org.hk>.

7. According to Wu Li-zhen, the principle of three religions in convergence derived from the fu-ji of Wong Tai Sin. The booklet San-Jiao Ming-Zong (三教明宗) published by Pu Yi Tan (普宜壇) in 1963 was to elaborate the doctrinal teaching of the three religions. She also mentioned that the principle can dated back to the practice of Pu Ji Tan (普濟壇) and Pu Yi Tan (普宜壇) in Guangzhou (Wu, 1997:74). However, I suspect that this is only a strategy asserting organizational reform by Huang Yun-tian.

8. The Donghua Hospital Group is a reputable social organization in Hong Kong. The Donghua Hospital Group operates hospitals, schools, old age homes and other charitable. It also administers 10 temples, whose management and surplus income were delegated to the Donghua Hospital Group by the Hong Kong government through the Chinese Temples Committee (Lang and Ragvald, 1988:69).

9. According to Chung Ka-kay, the seven senior directors were: Wu Gen-qing (吳根卿), Tang Fu-pian (唐福駢), Liang Gen-ze (梁根澤), Liang Jun-zhuan (梁鈞轉), Chen Rong-zhen (陳榮鎮), Feng Sheng-wu (馮繩武), and Su Gui-xuan (蘇桂軒) (Chung, 2000:24).

10. See note 6.

11. Ibid.

12. For example, a new holiday for the Birthday of Buddha was introduced after the year 1997, and Tung Chee-hwa, the Chief

Executive of the Hong Kong SAR government, and high ranking officials regularly took part in various ceremonies and social activities of Buddhism.

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