



# Story of Women's Commission





## 1 How It All Began

The setting up of the Women’s Commission in the early days of the 21st century was a milestone for women’s development in Hong Kong, an important achievement after years of endeavour by generations of individuals and social organisations to promote women’s well-being and interests.

The table below traces this historical development, listing significant events related to women in Hong Kong from the 1920s to the establishment of the Women’s Commission in 2001 (given the scale of this report and the amount of historical data available, the list is not exhaustive).

**An Enduring Vision  
A Pioneering Spirit**

Year	Event <sup>1</sup>
1921	The University of Hong Kong admits first female student
1923	<i>Mui tsai</i> system (where girls were adopted or sold into domestic servitude) falls into disuse
1932	First Infant Welfare Clinic, later Maternal and Child Health Centre, established
1949	First woman police sub-inspector appointed
1966	First woman Legislative Councillor appointed
1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marriage reform and related ordinances prohibit concubines and recognise women’s right to inheritance</li><li>• Six years’ free and universal basic education for girls and boys introduced</li><li>• Intestates’ Estate Ordinance gives both sons and daughters equal rights to their parents’ estates</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Main references:

- Tsang, G Y (1995): “Chronology of Women’s Achievements” in Pearson, V & Leung, B (eds) *Women in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: OUP
- Cheung, F (2002): *Women’s Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission*

1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Married Person Status Ordinance enables married women to hold property, sue and be sued</li> <li>• Matrimonial Causes Ordinance allows both husband and wife to petition for divorce on the grounds of an irretrievable breakdown of marriage</li> <li>• Offences Against the Person (Amendment) Ordinance makes abortion legal if two doctors agree that continuation of a pregnancy will cause greater physical or psychological harm to a woman</li> </ul>
1975	Women civil servants receive equal pay as men
1976	First woman Executive Councillor appointed
1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine years' free and universal basic education introduced</li> <li>• Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance preserves anonymity of complainants in rape cases</li> <li>• Legislation relating to prostitution prohibits solicitation but not the sex act per se</li> </ul>
1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymity for victims of indecent assault enforced</li> <li>• First woman appointed to head a Government department</li> </ul>
1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment (Amendment) Ordinance introduces 10 weeks' two-thirds maternity leave pay to female employees</li> <li>• Women civil servants receive the same terms and conditions of service as men, even when married</li> </ul>
1982	Five women gain seats in first District Board elections
1984	Two women disabled athletes win Hong Kong's first Paralympic Games gold medals
1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passage of Domestic Violence Ordinance gives victims the right to apply for an injunction to forbid molestation or to keep assailant away from the matrimonial home</li> <li>• First woman District Judge appointed</li> </ul>
1987	First woman appointed at Secretary level in the Government
1989	<b>New Territories women's groups meet the Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils to urge the government to set up a central committee to look after women's issues</b>
1990	Inland Revenue (Amendment) Ordinance introduces separate taxation for married women and removes clause in which definition of "individual" excludes a wife unless living apart from her husband

1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woman candidate elected in first direct elections to the Legislative Council</li> <li>• Women's groups form a coalition to urge the government to set up a working party to develop policies for women</li> <li>• <b>Legislative Council forms <i>ad hoc</i> group to study need for women's commission</b></li> </ul>
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fourteen women's and community groups campaign for government to establish a women's commission, with a rally on March 8 (International Women's Day)</b></li> <li>• <b>Legislative Council recommends setting up a women's commission with advisory status</b></li> <li>• <b>Legislative Council passes motion for extension of United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to Hong Kong</b></li> </ul>
1993	First woman Chief Secretary appointed
1994	New Territories Land (Exemption) Ordinance gives female indigenous residents the right to inherit land in the New Territories in the absence of a will
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sex Discrimination Ordinance brought in making sexual harassment and discrimination based on sex, marital status and pregnancy an offence</li> <li>• <b>Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, with consensus of 189 countries</b></li> </ul>
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal Opportunities Commission formed</li> <li>• <b>UN CEDAW extended to Hong Kong</b></li> <li>• Woman athlete wins Hong Kong's first Olympic gold medal</li> </ul>
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Status Discrimination Ordinance makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person who has family status (responsibility for the care of an immediate family member)</li> <li>• First female Secretary for Justice appointed</li> <li>• First female President of Provisional Legislative Council elected</li> </ul>
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First female President of Legislative Council elected</li> <li>• <b>Submission of HKSAR's initial report to UN CEDAW Committee</b></li> </ul>
1999	<b>UN CEDAW Committee urges HKSAR Government to set up a central mechanism for women</b>
2000	<b>Chief Secretary for Administration announces the Government's intention to set up a women's commission</b>
2001	<b>Women's Commission formed</b>