

## Women and Family

### Changes in Women's Familial Role and Family Pattern

Women and family have always been closely linked. In the capacity as a mother, a daughter-in-law, a wife, or a daughter, women in Hong Kong have witnessed the economic, social and cultural changes of the city over the past 50 years. Also changing in no small way has been their role in the family. The traditional large family with several generations living under the same roof and the old stereotypical value of "man being the breadwinner and woman the homemaker" have gradually faded into history. Taking their places are the nuclear or single parent families. Also, an increasing number of women have chosen to marry late or remained single. According to government statistics, the median age at first marriage for women has risen from 23.9 years in 1981 to 28.2 years in 2006. The median age of women at first childbirth has also gone up over the same period, from 25.1 years in 1981 to 29.2 years in 2006.

In the early days, married women were mostly unpaid homemakers and carers, staying at home to take care of the domestic routines for the whole family. They rarely engaged in work outside. Sometimes they would take up some outsourced jobs for factories at home to make ends meet. On the contrary, men's participation in household chores was relatively insignificant. With the advancement in economic development and women's education level, many women are now participating in the labour market, among whom many are married women who play the dual roles of homemakers and wage earners.

Divorce has become increasingly common in recent years, as divorce cases jumped from 2,062 in 1981 to 17,424 in 2006. This has resulted in the rise in the number of single parent families, with more women being single parents than men. These single parent women have to shoulder an even heavier responsibility.

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### Wedding Featuring a Mixture of Chinese and Western Styles

In the early years of Hong Kong, marriage followed the traditional Chinese customs and rituals. The bride would be dressed in a Chinese traditional wedding gown and the bridegroom mostly in western formal attire. Under the influence of western culture, wedding featuring a mixture of Chinese and western styles gradually gained popularity, in which the bridegroom would put on a western wedding suit and the bride would usually wear a white wedding dress for the ceremony and photo-taking, before changing into a Chinese traditional wedding gown for the Chinese rituals.



Source: Donated by Mrs. MOK



Source: Donated by Mrs. MOK



Source: Donated by Mrs. CHUNG LAU Kwok-ying



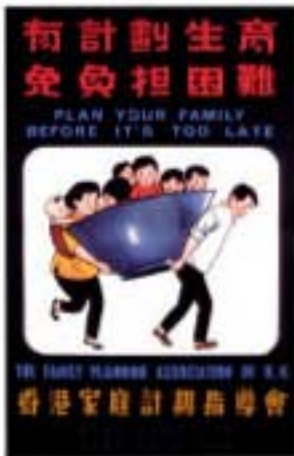
Source: Donated by Mrs. MOK

### Wedding on Boat

Fishermen, also known as boat people, used to have their wedding banquets held on boats. On the wedding day, relatives were invited to a sumptuous and lively feast. On the day before, Taoist priests would be asked to perform a blessing ceremony for the bride during which bells were rung and sutra chanted. The bride would then take off her old clothes and change into new ones, signaling the arrival of adulthood. After that, relatives of the bride would board her boat and keep her company for the whole day. They took turns to sing fishermen's folk songs that expressed gratitude to the mother for the hardship she went through during pregnancy and the parents for the upbringing. Relatives would later arrive to express their congratulations. Both the bridesmaids and groomsmen would sing folk songs in the form of a musical dialogue. On the wedding day, the bride, dressed in a red Chinese wedding gown, would kowtow and burn joss sticks to the ancestors. After the ancestral worship rituals, the wedding banquet would start in the evening.

## Family Planning Campaign

The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong (FPAHK), formerly known as the Hong Kong Eugenics League founded in 1936, adopted its name upon a re-organisation in 1950. It provides birth control service for the public. In 1967, FPAHK carried out the Hong Kong Family Planning Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Survey, the first territory-wide survey of its kind in Hong Kong, and kicked start a sex education programme. In the 1970s, FPAHK launched a "Two is Enough" campaign, which was a hit at that time and succeeded in spreading across the community the idea that having two children was enough. Coming to the 1980s, FPAHK changed tack and ran a "Be a Mr. Able in Family Planning" campaign to encourage men to share the responsibility of family planning.



Poster of FPAHK - 1962



Poster of FPAHK - 1975



Poster of FPAHK - 1975

“家庭計劃，男子有責”  
FAMILY PLANNING - MALE RESPONSIBILITY



Poster of FPAHK - 1983



Poster of FPAHK - 2003

## Unpaid Household Work

Women have long been a silent contributor to their families and the society in the form of undertaking unpaid household work. By unpaid household work we mean household work without remuneration, such as household chores and looking after family members. Nowadays, despite the high level of participation of Hong Kong's women in the labour market and other social spheres, the burden of household work still falls mostly on women. A survey on "the Time Use Pattern of Women and Men and their Pattern of Participation in Society" commissioned by the Women's Commission in late 2001/ early 2002 revealed that women did more household work than men and about 80% of those undertaking "heavy /very heavy household work" were women.



Women with dual roles are subject to dual burdens of work and family. Many families employ foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) and local domestic helpers to assist in household routines. The number of FDHs has increased by 41.7% from 164,229 in 1996 to 232,780 in 2006. The responsibilities of training the domestic helpers and childcare still rest mainly with women.

Picture Source: Information Services Department

## Women's Life in the Early Days - Interesting Anecdotes



Advertisement of the movie 'Factory Queen'  
Source: First Distributors (H.K.) Limited



A portrait of factory workers taken in a studio  
Source: Donated by Ms. TANG Mei-ho



A group photo of factory workers  
Source: Donated by Ms. FUNG Bo-kwan



A family gathering  
Source: Donated by Ms. Sophia KAO

wardrobes of female office workers in those days.

From the 'Mah Jie' who led an independent and autonomous life to the economically autonomous female factory and office workers, women engaged in gainful work had been able to broaden their horizons and enjoy a wider choice of pastimes and entertainments, such as tailoring, knitting, doing handcrafts, as well as visiting the countryside with workmates, taking photographs in studios, playing mahjong, watching Cantonese opera or going to cinema. These show that women found room to enjoy themselves outside family and work.

### Self-made Qipao

Qipao (Mandarin gown) is so named as it is a refinement of the long gown worn by Manchurian (Qi) women of the Qing Dynasty. With many qipao tailors and followers immigrating to Hong Kong in the 1940s to 50s, qipao soon became a fashion in the territory. Women who were fashion-conscious would also make their own qipao to demonstrate their craftsmanship.

### The Umbrella Dress Fashion

In the 1950s to 60s, umbrella dress was one of the most popular women outfits. It was mostly made of flower-print or checkered cloth. Umbrella dress could be a one-piece dress, i.e. tight-fitting at the top and spreading towards the bottom, with a belt wrapped around the waist; it could also be a skirt matched with simple top wear and a broad belt. Umbrella dress was a standard item in the

### The Bell-bottoms Fever

In the 1960s, bell-bottoms came majestically into women's fashion. This fashion apparel was originated from sailors' trousers. These long trousers are tightly fit at the hip & thigh, and become wider from the knees downwards. Coming into the early 1970s, bell-bottoms were nicknamed 'street sweeper trousers', with a 28-inch bottom edge covering the whole length of the shoes.



Advertisement of movie 'Three Flowers of the Factory'  
Source: First Distributors (H.K.) Limited



An outing of factory workers  
Source: Donated by Ms. CHIU



An outing organized by the union  
Source: Donated by Ms. FUNG Bo-kwan



Factory workers participating in leisure activities  
Source: Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association

## The Seven Sisters' Festival



10 August 1940



1 August 1949



20 August 1950

The Seven Sisters' Festival, also known by the names of the Night of Sevens and the Festival to Plead for Skills, is celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month every year. The festival has its origin in a Chinese folklore. The legend has it that there were seven goddesses and one of them was blessed with rare beauty and great weaving skill. One day she descended to the human world where she fell in love with a cow herder and married him. When this came to the Emperor in Heaven's notice, he was so angry that he separated the two lovers and only allowed them to meet once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month.

Before the 1950s, it was a prevailing custom for the young women in Hong Kong, especially those working in factories, to worship the seven sisters. On the night of the festival, single women would dress properly in their finest attire and joined the evening parties in small groups. They would also make offerings to the seven sisters on the rooftop or the balcony to plead for a skill mastered by the goddess, a subtle request for finding an ideal mate. The mother would worship the cow herder on the eighth day of the seventh lunar month, praying for her son a virtuous wife. In the 1960s, the festival was a bustling event. But with urban development, this custom has gradually faded out. Today, the Seven Sisters' Temple still stands in Peng Chau, the only one left in Hong Kong. It preserves the custom of worshipping the seven goddesses alongside with the Seven Saints' Temple in Kwun Hang, Shap Sze Heung.



26 August 1952

Picture Source: Sing Tao News Corporation Limited