

COMMENTHK

Resilient Hong Kong copes with stress remarkably well

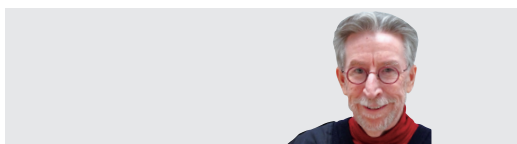
Richard Cullen says city handled far better than most large cities in the developed world when encountering severe headwinds

Not so long ago, Melbourne still had a serious, long-standing newspaper. The Age was founded in 1854. I began reading it regularly in the 1970s. For some months, one columnist had me puzzled. His columns (let's call him Mr Smith) were always clear and readable, though they had a marked right-wing tilt. He specialized in commentary about the USSR and South Africa.

The pattern of his commentary was plain and continuous: USSR unacceptable; apartheid in South Africa, acceptable. At that time, both seemed to be overburdened with drawbacks, but South Africa's racist foundations were truly beyond the pale.

Eventually, I worked out how he sustained this suspect narrative week after week — he had devised a handy, selective comparative framework. Essentially, he constantly benchmarked the USSR against an abstracted, idealized form of government (the perfect government in the sky, as it were). And then benchmarked South Africa against the pre-denigrated USSR. This embedded discriminatory comparison worked very well to undergird the dominant narrative.

Moving on several decades to 2019 in Hong Kong, I came across many people who criticized the Hong Kong Police Force, often fiercely, for its alleged abuse of power as it tried to bring the "black-shirt" insurrection under control, while itself came under often fabricated and unjustified complaints. On repeated occasions, when I had the chance to discuss these claims, I asked the person making them: Can you name me any police force, anywhere, that you believe could do a better job than the Hong Kong police in these circumstances? Almost without exception, this question was met with abject silence. Occasionally, I was told that they could have done better. True. But everyone can always do better. Those most critical of the police reverted, naturally it seemed, to relying on a version of the Mr Smith strategy: They benchmarked the Hong Kong Police Force not against the performance of other real-life police forces — but against an abstracted perfect police force in the sky.



Richard Cullen
The author is an adjunct professor in the faculty of Law, Hong Kong University.

As Grenville Cross has recently argued, the Hong Kong Police Force, applying any reasonable real-life comparative test, measures up remarkably well when one looks back, particularly over the period since 2019 (Professional policing: HKPF shows British counterparts the way, China Daily Hong Kong Edition). This article cogently maintains that there is much, today, that police forces in the UK could learn from Hong Kong policing, noting that "anybody who has visited the UK's cities and towns recently will know that the sight of police officers patrolling the streets is almost as rare as a glimpse of the Loch Ness monster".

Very recently, Hong Kong has endured a Category 10 typhoon followed by a period of extremely intense rainfall. On the worst (Black Rainstorm) day, parts of Hong Kong received over 600 millimeters of rain within 24 hours. This is around 25 percent of the average annual rainfall in the city.

The British, when they ran Hong Kong, developed a deep, experience-based understanding of the need to stormproof Hong Kong, and then set about improving protection levels over many decades. That legacy, which is excellent, has been well-maintained since 1997. But this recent, exceptional level of extreme weather has stress-tested these coping systems in ways that signal rethinking is needed to deal with likely similar episodes in the future.

When natural disasters strike, unsurprisingly, criticism focused on governance follows. Think of how people responded after witnessing Australia's prime minister taking a secret vacation in 2019 as a major natural disaster unfolded; the American government responses to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005; and the terrible recent fires in Hawaii, for example.

We are seeing a repeat of this phenomenon here in Hong Kong. These weather events have severely tested our installed, bad weather infrastructure and our bad weather response mechanisms. There has, thus, been a good deal of critical commentary related to both of these aspects, focused on the government. When it is constructive (rather than crudely political) criticism, this is good to see. It confirms that we live in a city where public accountability matters, and where concerned, thoughtful residents are forthright in telling the government what they think has gone wrong and what should be done.

At the same time, we need to maintain an appropriate, real-life perspective. Government performance should not be primarily benchmarked, in Mr Smith fashion, against an abstract ideal-governance-vision.

Thus, it is fair to say that the recovery procedures applied by the MTR after the terrible flooding, especially at Wong Tai Sin station, were first-rate. Getting the system up and running again rapidly helped people at all levels. The swift restoration of a bus service and other transport systems was also very effective. The vital, single road to Shek O had operative repairs applied soon after the major damage it suffered. Elsewhere, fallen trees were quickly cleared, and you could see how energetically many people applied themselves to the cleanup. And electricity supplies and other utilities all held up very well overall.

Had London, New York or Melbourne, for example, been hit with 25 percent of their total yearly rainfall in a single day, it is frankly inconceivable that they each could have recovered with the efficiency and application demonstrated in Hong Kong.

Lately, Hong Kong has — literally and metaphorically — encountered some very severe headwinds. Still, it has coped far better than most large cities in the developed world could manage. That said, there are imperative lessons to be learned from this recent, concentrated, climate-related stress testing, and it is up to the government, above all, to ensure that this learning process is accelerated, leading to aptly reset policies.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Law Man-wah
The author is the former head of financial management (general manager) of Bank of China (HK).

Stronger connection key to boosting competitiveness

Industries in Hong Kong are evolving and transforming, and new skills and knowledge are always in demand. Some experts point out that the skills and knowledge that students learn from universities do not fully align with the expectations of industrialists. Against this backdrop, how universities, professional bodies and industries bridge the gap is an item high on the agenda. Thus, building a stronger connection among the three parties is crucial to boosting the competitiveness of Hong Kong enterprises.

Recently, three successful cases have come into the picture. Yuan Valley is a networking base for entrepreneurs set up at the University of Hong Kong Business School-Shenzhen Campus. The center aims to provide a full range of incubation services for high-tech startups and help them commercialize their research and development results with financing, marketing and networking support. Hong Kong entrepreneur Lam Wa-kit recalls that initially, he had no clue how to reach out to Chinese mainland companies to tell them about a green product from his company. Things changed dramatically after his firm joined the center. Ju Ziqian, director of the Shenzhen campus, said Yuan Valley was an important incubation site, and HKU would help to line up cooperation between their startups and collaborative platforms, such as the Science Park and Cyberport, and help them explore international markets.

The Chinese University of Hong Kong Medical Centre has partnered with Huawei Technologies to become the first 5G smart hospital in Hong Kong. The hospital incorporates several advanced 5G technologies, such as third-party logistics management solutions and real-time location systems, to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency, medical safety, and to provide a better patient experience. The hospital's CEO, Fung Hong, said the 5G livestream system in the operating theater sees cameras capture sharp real-time video images of surgeries for transmission to the auditorium.

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology became the first local university to launch a satellite after it launched a multispectral optical satellite at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu with Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co Ltd on Aug 25. It will be used for tracking remote sensing data related to global environment, disasters and sustainable development. The satellite is the most advanced civilian type and marks an important milestone in Hong Kong's aerospace development. HKUST Council Chair Shum Heung-Yeung said, "We look forward to cooperation with the government, research institutes, enterprises and different sectors for wider application of the data we will obtain through our cooperation with Chang Guang."

On top of these, professional bodies are working closely with industries in this regard. Here are two illustrative examples.

The Hong Kong Productivity Council is a statutory organization with a vision to be the key enabler and catalyst of innovation, applied technology and value creation, delivering a social, economical and environmental impact for bolstering Hong Kong as an international innovation and technology center, as well as a mission to drive technologies to enhance productivity of Hong Kong enterprises.

The HKPC has established a New Industrialisation Development Centre (NI Centre) to address the pain points faced by local enterprises in terms of technology during upgrading and transformation, talent and resources, to help enterprises embrace smart manufacturing while enhancing their sustainable development capabilities.

The HKPC has successfully supported over 150 enterprises with operations across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to achieve smart manufacturing, covering 25 industries, including microelectronics, metals plastics and biotechnology. Going forward, the NI Centre will promote to the industries the success stories of Hong Kong enterprises, adopting new industrialization practices and the latest technologies, to encourage more industry partners to join hands and promote new industrialization.

The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers is going to hold more interactive communication activities with industries so as to upgrade the ability of local engineers in the area of innovative technologies, and to further consolidate the status of Hong Kong as a hub for professional-knowledge exchanges. Lee Chi-hong, president of the institution, led a team of 40 young engineers to Guangzhou on Aug 12 to kick-start the exchange of scientific technology business among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. The purpose of the visit, apart from an intellectual exchange with mainland professionals, was to keep abreast of the latest development of engineering projects and applications of environmental technologies there.

Building a stronger connection among universities, professional bodies and industries requires collaboration and communication of the key stakeholders. I suggest three workable strategies to achieve that:

First, establish more synergies between industries and academia via collaboration. Collaboration can also be in the form of joint research projects, resource sharing, internship programs, industry advisory boards, networking events, conferences, or guest lectures by industry professionals. These activities facilitate knowledge exchanges and serve as platforms to showcase industry projects, research findings, and success stories, fostering a sense of community and mutual understanding.

Second, industry-focused research and innovation. The collaboration should address specific industry challenges, contribute to the development of new technologies and solutions, and apply research outcomes to practical applications. This can benefit related parties by fostering innovation and enhancing competitiveness.

Third, aligning a course curriculum with industry needs. When designing a curriculum, universities should listen more to the voices of industries to ensure that they can provide a steady flow of talented new blood to meet the needs of local industries. They should also ensure their graduates are future-ready with innovative ideas.

In the final analysis, it is imperative to establish a framework for building a stronger connection among universities, professional bodies and industries. This can facilitate dialogue, address challenges, and identify new opportunities arising in the marketplace. As a result, Hong Kong can create a more integrated ecosystem that supports the pooling of talents and drives economic growth to a higher stage.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Stronger bonds help enhance family life in HK

Hong Kong has experienced a significant socioeconomic transformation over the past few decades, which has influenced family structures and dynamics. Rapid urbanization, increased participation of women in the workforce, and globalization have contributed to a shift in traditional family values. As a result, various family problems have arisen, affecting individuals and communities alike.

Historically, Hong Kong placed significant emphasis on Confucian values, such as filial piety and family unity. However, with modernization and urbanization, traditional family structures have undergone changes. The extended family model, in which several generations lived together under one roof, has gradually transitioned to a nuclear family model consisting of parents and children. This shift has led to reduced intergenerational interactions and a weakening of the support system within families. Additionally, as more individuals seek opportunities outside Hong Kong, the phenomenon of "migrating families" has emerged, leading to further challenges in maintaining familial bonds.

Hong Kong, like many developed regions, faces demographic challenges, including an aging population and a declining birthrate. The aging population means that more elderly individuals require care and support, placing additional responsibilities on the working-age population. This phenomenon is often referred to as the "silver tsunami", wherein the proportion of older adults is increasing rapidly. Simultaneously, the declining birthrate leads to smaller family sizes, reducing the potential pool of caregivers for the elderly. Balancing these demands becomes a critical issue for families, impacting their overall dynamics and well-being.

Hong Kong's fast-paced and competitive lifestyle often results in long working hours and high levels of stress for individuals. This situation affects the quality and quantity of time spent with family members. Work-related demands can leave limited time for familial interactions, leading to strained relationships and reduced emotional connections. The lack of a healthy work-life balance can also lead to burnout and adversely impact the physical and mental health of family members.

Mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and stress, are prevalent in Hong Kong, yet they remain stigmatized in society. This stigma often prevents individuals from seeking help and support from their families. Consequently, family members may not recognize the signs of distress or may be hesitant to discuss mental health openly. The lack of open communication restricts family members' ability to offer the necessary support and understanding, leading to further isolation and challenges when



Lau Kin-shing
The author is vice-president of the Hong Kong Psychological Counselling and Consultation Society.

dealing with mental health issues.

Hong Kong's soaring property prices and limited land availability contribute to an affordable-housing crisis. Families, especially those with lower incomes, struggle to find suitable accommodations, leading to overcrowded living conditions. Such living arrangements can exacerbate tensions within families and create an environment that is not conducive to fostering strong family bonds.

Hong Kong's education system is renowned for its competitiveness, and students face tremendous pressure to excel academically. As parents are deeply invested in their children's success, they may push them relentlessly, leading to increased stress for both parents and students. The intense focus on academic achievements can strain family relationships, as discussions often revolve around school performance rather than fostering open communication and emotional support.

Hong Kong's rapid economic development has led to growing income disparities, with a considerable wealth gap between the rich and the poor. Families from lower-income backgrounds face significant challenges in accessing opportunities for advancement and resources to improve their overall well-being. Economic inequality can result in social tensions and stress within families, impacting their overall stability and harmony.

Addressing family problems in Hong Kong requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the changing dynamics within families, the impact of societal pressures, and the challenges posed by economic conditions. By implementing strategies to enhance work-life balance, promote mental health awareness, provide affordable housing solutions, reform the education system, and address economic disparities, Hong Kong can foster healthier family relationships and create a more supportive environment for families to thrive.

Work-life balance is crucial for maintaining healthy family relationships and individual well-being in Hong Kong's fast-paced and competitive environment. Encouraging employers to offer flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, flexible hours and compressed workweeks, allows employees to better manage their work and personal commitments.

This flexibility enables parents to spend more quality time with their children and engage in family activities.

Promoting mental health awareness and providing support within families can help reduce stigma and foster open communication. Launching public awareness campaigns to destigmatize mental health issues and promote the importance of seeking help and support can encourage families to have open discussions about mental health. Introducing mental health education in schools and community centers can help young individuals and parents understand the importance of mental well-being, recognize signs of distress, and learn coping strategies. Ensuring easy access to counseling and mental health services for individuals and families in need can provide the necessary support during challenging times.

Investing in community-based family support programs and counseling services can empower families to cope with challenges and build resilience. Implementing parenting programs that provide guidance on effective parenting techniques and communication skills can enhance family dynamics and improve parent-child relationships. Establishing family counseling centers that offer professional counseling and mediation services can help families navigate conflicts and strengthen their connections. Organizing support groups for families facing specific challenges, such as single parenting or caring for elderly family members, creates a platform for sharing experiences and seeking advice.

Reforming the education system to reduce pressure on students and parents can improve family relationships and overall well-being. Promoting a holistic approach to education that values character development, emotional intelligence and creativity can reduce the intense focus on academic achievements and foster a healthier learning environment. Implementing assessment methods that emphasize continuous evaluation rather than relying heavily on high-stakes examinations can alleviate stress on students and parents. Promoting extracurricular activities and interests beyond academics can provide students with a more balanced and fulfilling educational experience.

Promoting gender equality can lead to more equitable family roles and responsibilities. Ensuring equal opportunities for women in the workforce through policies and initiatives can support women who are balancing career and family life. Encouraging shared parental responsibilities, such as parental leave for both mothers and fathers, can create a more supportive family environment and strengthen bonds between parents and children.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.