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The Socially Malnourished Children:
An Anatomy of the Self-image
of a Student Population in Hong Kong

Tak-sing Cheung

SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTRE
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY
OF HONG KONG

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by

TAK-SING CHEUNG

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Dr. Tak-sing Cheung (1944-) received his B.S.Sc. from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1972, M.A. and Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1974 and 1977 respectively. Currently he is Lecturer in Sociology, Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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THE SOCIALLY MALNOURISHED CHILDREN: AN ANATOMY OF
THE SELF-IMAGE OF A STUDENT POPULATION IN HONG KONG

If role is the individual in society, the self is then society in the individual.

From one point of view, as Newcomb (1951) suggested, nothing is so private, so strictly intra-individual, as one's own self which is the individual as known to the individual. From another perspective, however, nothing can be more social than the self because if you squeeze the self of all its social contents, what remains, perhaps, is the "I"-- the self as the knower or the synthesizer, the existence of which is pretty much in doubt upon further deliberation (See James 1890; Kolb 1944). In fact, the self originates from nowhere but society. It is the miniature of society in the individual (Mead 1965). Therefore, the significance of the self-concept goes beyond the individual himself, for it mirrors the reality of the society of which he is a member.

This paper attempts to study the Hong Kong society as reflected from the self-concept of a group of 588 students, who come from one primary and two secondary schools. Their ages range from 5 to 19, with 326 males and 262 females. These subjects do not constitute a probability sample of any kind. Strictly speaking, therefore, the findings herein generated cannot be

generalized to the entire student population in Hong Kong. It is intended as an exploratory study, hoping to shed light on the possibility of studying a kaleidoscopic society with a simple measuring instrument known as the Twenty Statements Test, designed by Kuhn and McPartland (1954).

The instrument is very simple. It is a sheet of paper with twenty blanks, preceded by an instruction as follows:

There are twenty numbered blanks on the page below. Please write twenty answers to the simple question "Who am I?" in the blanks. Just give twenty different answers to this question. Answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself, not to somebody else. Write the answers in the order that they occur to you. Don't worry about logic or "importance". Go along fairly fast, for time is limited.

Needless to say, Primary 1 and Primary 2 students would have difficulty in comprehending this long and somewhat complicated passage. So oral explanation was necessary. All the subjects were given twelve minutes to finish this part. Afterwards, they were requested to turn over to another page to provide some background information such as sex, age, religious affiliation, place of origin, place of birth, father's occupation, etc. The whole test took about twenty minutes.

Despite its simplicity, the Twenty Statements Test is a very promising instrument for eliciting an individual's

conceptions of himself. According to a recent assessment (Spitzer and Parker 1976), it has the highest perceived validity, among other measures of the self-concept, in the eyes of the subjects. One of its obvious advantages is that it allows the respondent to volunteer statements about himself. As Newcomb said (1950:151), "If we present ready-made statements to a respondent we can never know whether he would have ever made such statements about himself without such suggestion; it is a reasonable conjecture on the other hand that if he volunteers statements about himself with a minimum of stimulation, then these statements may be taken to be significant ones."

Whether that social fact has to be explained at its own level, as Durkheim so vehemently sanctioned, or that the ultimate explanation of all social behavior has to be sought in psychology, as Homans so confidently contended, is an endless controversy. Let us for this moment forget about the traditional feuds between these two levels of analysis and see how much of a complicated society like Hong Kong can be reflected from a psychological mirror. Contrary to Cooley's metaphor that society is the looking glass of an individual's self, the author takes the position that the self can in turn serve as a mirror from which we see our society. Needless to say, the present approach is not, and never can be, a substitute for others.

It serves its own purpose so long as it succeeds in yielding insights on certain aspects of the Hong Kong society which could not have been otherwise obtained.

The Uni-Model Distribution of Locus Scores

According to Kuhn (Schwirian 1964:51), all statements given by the respondents can be classified into five categories, as follows:

1. Consensual: "... all statements about social position of the respondent and his roles attendant thereupon. These include statements of social category such as name, age, religious membership, political affiliation, kin relations, race, national origin, other formal and informal group memberships,"
2. Preferences: "... all statements of the general order of 'I am interested in, ' 'I avoid .., ' 'I prefer, '..."
3. Beliefs: "... all statements of a cosmic sort, all those having to do with religious beliefs, philosophical assumptions or on the general nature of morals and ethics."
4. Aspirations: "all statements indicating what the respondent expects to do or be in the future"
5. Self-evaluations: "... all evaluation statements -- statements assessing one's own mental, physical and other abilities, physique and appearance, relatedness to others, ..."

Kuhn and McPartland gave particular attention to the consensual statements (all other statements are called subconsensual statements). The number of consensual statements made by a respondent is called the locus score, which is taken as a measure of the extent of an individual's social anchorage, or the extent to which he sees himself as a member of social systems (Kuhn and McPartland 1954).

Figure 1 Mean Consensual Statements Made by Different Age-Groups

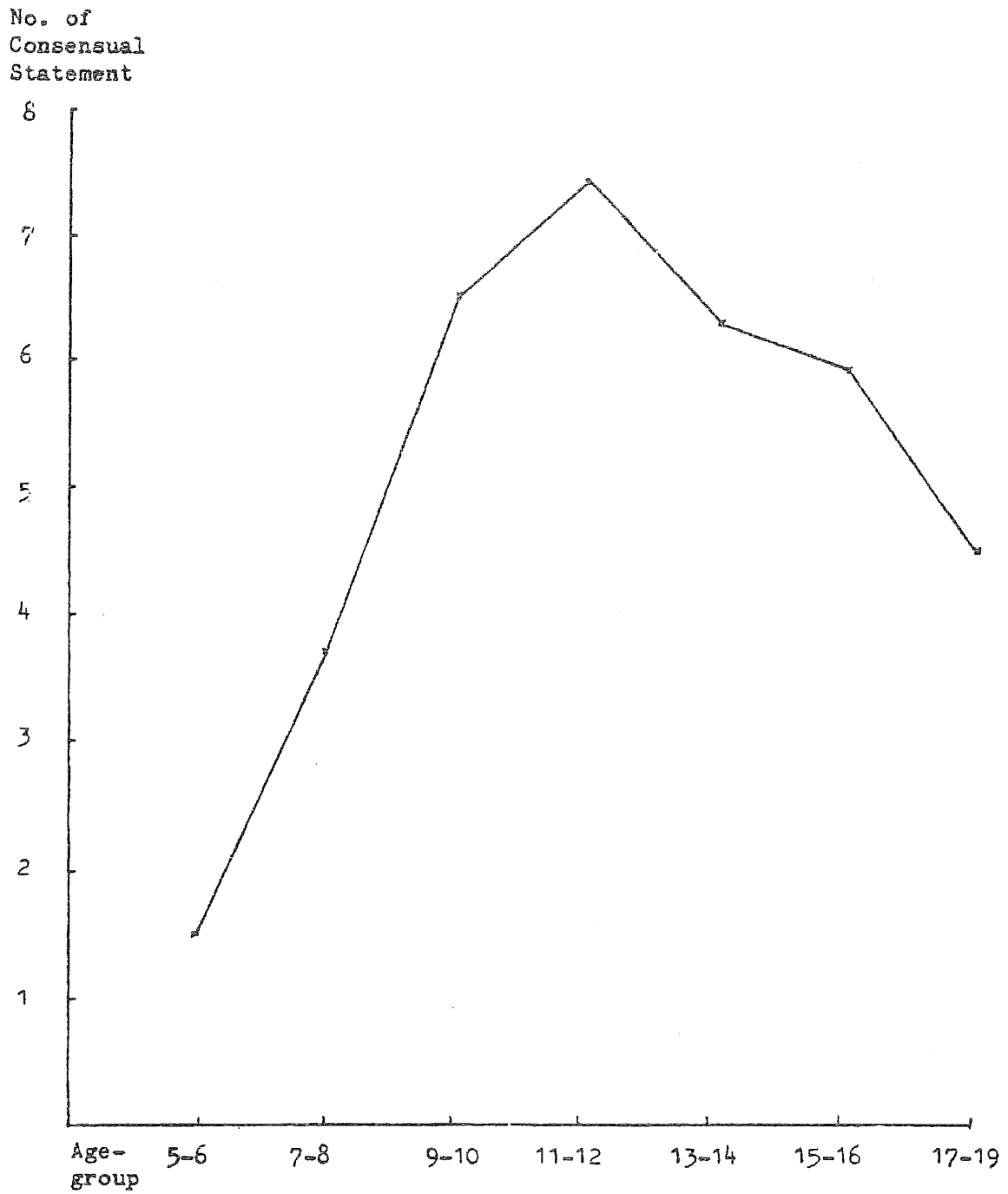


Figure 1 shows the mean locus scores of respondents in different age-groups. On the whole, the locus score of our respondents is quite low, with a grand mean of 5.5, as compared to 10 in Kuhn and McPartland's study (1954). From a developmental point of view, the locus scores increase steadily from the age-group of 5-6 to that of 11-12 and starts to level off thereupon. Since the total statements given by respondents in each age-group vary, Figure 2 presents the proportion of each type of statements in different age-groups. Now to compare the curve of consensual statements with that in Figure 1: although the peak has shifted from the age-group of 11-12 to that of 9-10, the pattern is largely similar -- both exhibit a uni-modal pattern, climbing up at first and, to a certain point, moving downward thereafter.

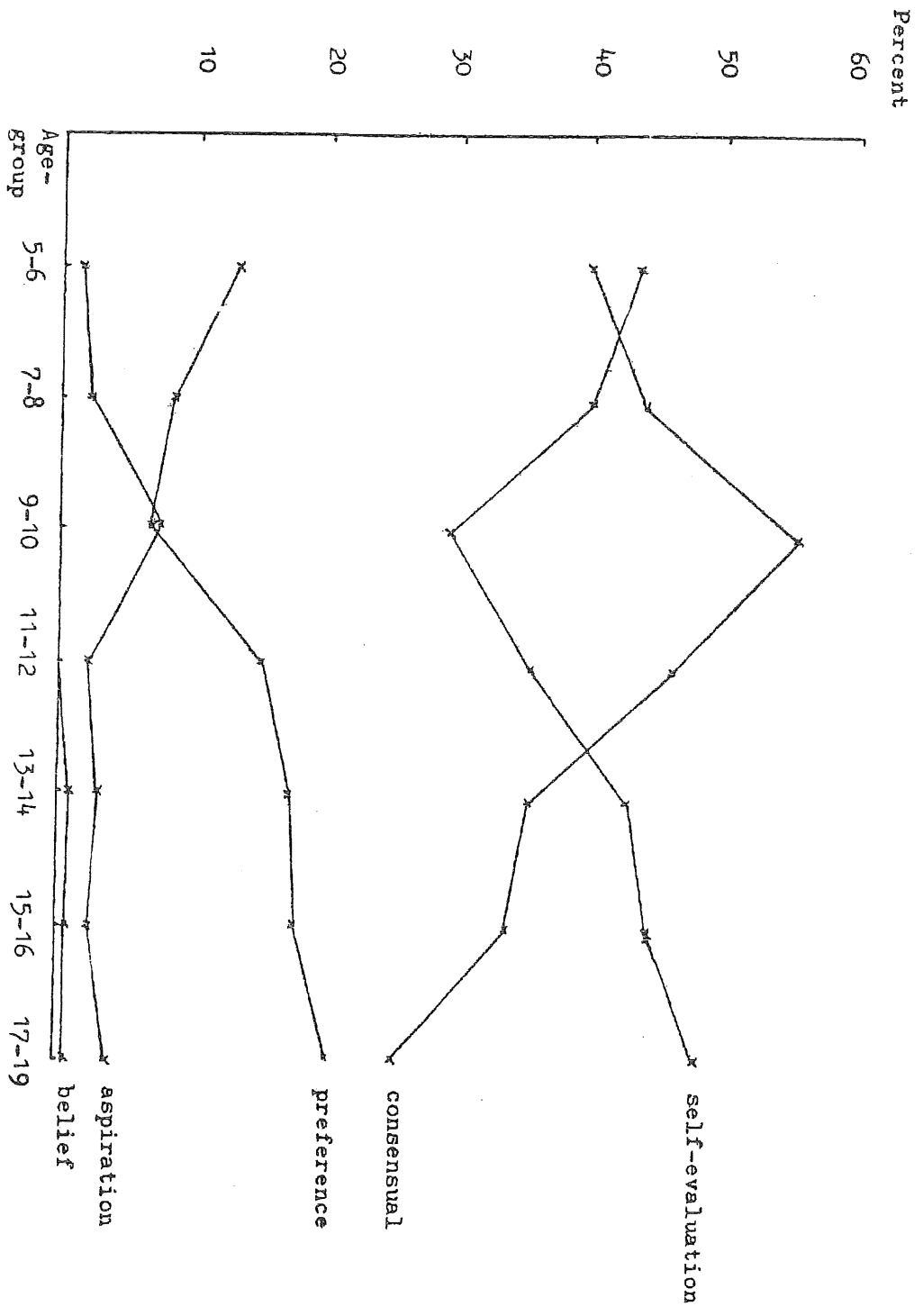


Figure 2 : Proportions of Types of Statements in Different Age-Groups

This pattern is in contradistinction to that observed by McPartland (1953) and Kuhn (1960), in their respective studies. In Kuhn's research, which dealt with a greater age range, it was found that "locus scores steadily increase from those of seven-year-olds (the youngest thus far tested) with an average locus score of 5.79 through twenty-four-year-olds with an average locus score of 11.03". He added that "This association is what we would expect from the orientation. As the average individual grows from the age of seven to that of twenty-four, he becomes -- or so we would suppose -- a member of more groups, and his roles are differentiated on the basis of divergent categories. As a consequence he will internalize as a significant part of his self-definition a larger volume of these identifying statuses." (p.p.44-45)

If the positive association between age and the locus score is "what we would expect," as Kuhn maintained, then the pattern of movement as observed among our subjects is something peculiar. And, if the locus score reflects the extent of an individual's social anchorage, as mentioned earlier, then the curve in Figure 1 suggests that our subjects have begun to retreat to individualism from the

ages of 13-14 onwards.¹ For a more detailed analysis, let us now turn to the substantive aspect of our subjects' self-image, as shown in Table 1.

1 Dr. Rance P.L. Lee, in his critique of the first draft of this paper, voiced the concern that because the older subjects are intellectually more mature, they are more capable of writing down non-consensual statements and, as a result, there will be lesser space for making consensual statements. This concern can be clarified by two points: 1) If intelligence, which is assumed to be positively related to age, is positively related to the locus score, then the pattern of movement in Figure 1 should be linear rather than unimodal. 2) According to Kuhn and McPartland (1954:115), "respondents tended to exhaust all of the consensual references they would make before they made (if at all) any subconsensual ones." This finding was confirmed in all subsequent replication studies that I know of, including the present research.

Table 1 : Percentages of subjects Mentioning Particular Social Categories in Different Age-Groups

Age-Groups	Name*	Age	Sex	Family	School	Human Being	Hong Kong	China	Religion	Resi- dence	Place of Origin	Society	Assoc- iation	Race	Social Class
5-6 (N=39)	92.3	7.7	7.7	15.4	33.3	5.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
7-8 (N=83)	84.3	28.9	30.1	30.1	36.1	44.6	4.8	12.0	7.2	3.6	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
9-10 (N=78)	70.5	35.9	34.6	51.2	67.9	46.2	6.4	5.1	17.9	11.5	2.6	2.6	9.0	0.0	0.0
11-12 (N=87)	55.2	40.2	47.1	58.6	85.1	42.5	14.8	18.4	12.6	24.1	3.4	11.5	3.4	1.1	1.1
13-14 (N=112)	46.2	36.6	56.3	52.7	76.8	37.5	24.1	25.0	12.5	22.3	7.1	18.8	6.3	2.7	8.0
15-16 (N=103)	44.7	35.9	52.4	44.7	71.8	35.0	25.2	37.9	21.4	11.7	6.8	15.5	3.9	8.7	6.8
17-18 (N=84)	36.9	27.4	52.4	36.9	83.3	17.9	17.9	33.3	25.0	3.6	4.8	7.1	1.2	4.8	5.6
Total	57.5	32.5	44.0	43.9	67.7	34.9	15.1	20.6	15.0	12.6	5.1	9.4	3.7	2.9	3.7

* Including references to oneself without indicating the name such as "I am XXX," "I am myself". In most instances, however, the name was written down.

The Three Stages of Self-Development:

Table 1 further analyses the consensual statements given by our respondents. All the consensual statements were content-analysed and classified. The social categories listed in the table is not exhaustive. A few of the subjects mentioned they were Asians, men in the sub-tropical zone, etc. These categories were not entered because of the extremely small number of individuals mentioning them. However, the social categories listed there represent at least 98% of all the consensual responses. They were cross-tabulated with age-groups so that we can follow the development of the self from early childhood to the later stage of adolescence.

We know from Mead (1965:199) that "The self has a character which is different from that of the physiological organism proper it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity."² However, when the self begins to emerge is not certain. Theoretically, since the self is a conscious experience, it could not have existed before a child has a

² In his presidential address to the 14th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Allport (1943) said that, "Infants, all writers concur, do not recognize themselves as individuals; they behave in what Piaget calls an 'undifferentiated absolute' composed of self and environment. Only gradually and with difficulty does a segregated ego evolve."

certain degree of consciousness. And, since language is primarily responsible for creating consciousness, it could not have arisen before the acquisition of language. Generally, there are indications that the self has already emerged for a two-year-old child (Cooley 1964; Piaget 1968; Denzin 1972). Between this and the time when the simplest kind of measuring instrument is assessible to the child, the interim development is still a matter of speculation.

But this does not matter, for the self-concept of our youngest subjects (aged 5 and 6) is not much different from that as it first came into existence. It is still in a primordial state, remaining largely as an undifferentiated entity. The name is the major tag of identification³ around which lie some dim and vague reflections of the child's own characteristics. The average total statement given by this age group is three. Most of them just write down their names. Some add one or two statements, such as "I am a student", "Mama loves me", etc. Beyond these, they have difficulty in describing themselves. According to the

³ The child succeeds in differentiating himself from the rest of the surrounding environment largely through the recognition of his own name, given to him by his parents, and its association with his organic body. This explains why the name usually serves as the major tag of self-identification at the early stage of self-development.

observation of our research assistant who administered questionnaires to the students, they were caught in perplexity when asked to answer the question "Who Am I?". It seemed that they did not know who they were except by giving out their names.

For those in the age-group of 7-8, the self-image becomes more variegated. In addition to that more students locate themselves in the categories of age, sex, school, the family, and human being, such social axes as religion and residence sprout at the age of 7 while Hong Kong, China and place of origin at the age of 8. We see, therefore, differentiation of the self is in process. If the emergence of the self begins with the differentiation of the organic body from its surrounding environment, i.e., an external differentiation, then the second stage of development begins when differentiation occurs within one's own self, i.e., an internal differentiation.

For the children in the age-group of 9-10, internal differentiation continues. The percentage of self-reference in name, though still the largest, keeps on declining. Their self-image is more solidly grounded in age, sex, the family, school, and human being. Besides, some students at the age of 10 begin to identify themselves as members of society and associations.

In the age-group of 11-12, it is the first time when the percentage of self-reference in name is surpassed by those in the family and school. This signals that the internal differentiation of the self has developed to the extent where an individual's name is no longer the most important tag of self-identification. On the other hand, both at the age of 12, one student mentioned race and the other social class in their responses. With the emergence of these two objects of self-identification, we can say that the internal differentiation of the self has been completed, in the sense that all the major social groupings have already been incorporated in the individual's mind.

At the ages of 13-14, approximately the time when an individual enters the secondary school, the percentages of subjects mentioning the family, school⁴, age and residence categories begin to decline. This signals the gradual transition of the self-development into its third stage, despite the fact that, in other social axes, their percentages continue to increase. The major characteristic of this stage is the individual's disengagement from the

⁴ The upsurge of percentage in the age-group of 17-19 may be attributed to the fact that students of this age-group are facing the Education Certificate Examination which heightens their self-consciousness of being a student.

social axes upon which he anchored at the previous stage. This stage covers the entire population of our subjects in the secondary school. Further disengagement can be observed in the age-group of 15-16, where the categories of sex, society, social class and place of origin begin to level off and, among our oldest subjects, even the categories of Hong Kong, China, and race decline.

However, unlike the first stage when an individual's self is primarily anchored in his name, the individualistic orientation at this stage is no longer expressed in name but in more frequent references to personal characteristics and preferences. If we go back to Figure 2, we can see that at the third stage, as the proportion of consensual statements decreases, the proportions of preferential and self-evaluative statements increase. In the same figure, we can also observe that among all age-groups, aspirational statements are very few and ideological responses are conspicuously absent. This suggests that our subjects' consciousness is preoccupied with a present-tense and a this-worldly orientation.

To recapitulate, the self-image of our subjects, whose ages range from 5 to 19, has undergone three stages of development. The first stage to which the 5 and 6 year old children belong is continuous with the early development when the child succeeds in differentiating himself from the

surrounding environment and hence acquires a primitive self-image. At this stage, the self is quite homogeneous and egocentric, with the name as its major tag of identification. Roughly beginning from the seven year old child, the development of the self enters the second phase when it undergoes an internal differentiation, adding to it, gradually and successively, more social components. All the major social axes have already emerged in the self around the age of twelve and by now the self can be taken as mature and its development largely completed. From the thirteen year old onwards, although most social components continue to grow, the percentages of subjects mentioning the family, school, age and residence show signs of decay. This signals the development of the self into its third phase when the individual gradually disengages himself from the social axes upon which he anchored at the previous stage and returns to an individualistic orientation.

Just as the stream of historical evolution is inseparable in reality, the division of the development of our subjects' self-image into three stages is purely analytical. There is no clear demarcation line between one stage and another. Nonetheless, as our data indicate, the trend discussed above does exist and is visible. More important is that it is consistent with the pattern shown in Figure 1, suggesting the declining importance of social participation in shaping our subjects' self-image from the age of 13 onwards.

The Socially Malnourished Children:

We see, therefore, that the analyses of both the frequency and the substantive content of the consensual statements given by our subjects consistently reveal that they retreat to individualism at a very early stage of life, especially in comparison with finding established by Kuhn (1960). It is of course unjustifiable to label the self-development of our subjects abnormal merely by a comparison with similar finding generated from another sample. Theories abound to show, however, that man has a deep-rooted psychological propensity of ego-extension. Contrary to the common notion that man is inherently selfish⁵, many psychologists and sociologists have noted the tenacious tendency of extending the boundary of one's self far beyond the organic body (James 1890; McDougall 1908; Allport 1955; Durkheim 1963; etc.) For some obscure reasons, man is in fear of being alone, which we sometimes refer to as the gregarious instinct. The individual's precarious existence gives rise to psychological vulnerability which, in turn, propells him to affiliate with a

5 Of course, the argument over whether man is inherently selfish becomes meaningless if we understand that the boundary of the self can expand beyond the confine of the organic body.

larger entity⁶. So, as Allport (1968:28-29) said:

(The early developments of the self) have a heavily biological quality and seem to be contained within the organism itself. But soon the process of learning brings with it a high regard for possessions, for loved objects, and later, ideal causes and loyalties A child, however, who identifies with his parent is definitely extending his sense of self, as he does likewise through his love for pets, dolls, or other possessions, animate or inanimate.

As we grow older we identify with groups, neighborhood, and nation as well as with possessions, clothes, home. Later in life the process of extension may go to great lengths, through the development of loyalties and of interests focused on abstractions and on moral and religious values. Indeed, a mark of maturity seems to be the range and extent of one's feeling of self-involvement in abstract ideals. (Underlining not in original)

This quotation well summarizes the normal course for a child's self-development. It is a transition from the organismically-centered orientation to the socially-extended orientation. As he grows older and becomes a member of more groups and categories, his self will take lodging in a wider spectrum of social bases. We do not know even roughly at what age when this social extension of the self reaches its peak. We do know, however, that this trend continues until at least the age of twenty-four in adults from the U.S.

⁶ Eric Fromm's observation of the German and Italian massive escape from freedom is a classic revelation of this underlying psychological propensity.

The question is: what are the factors that prevent the continued social anchorage of our subjects' self-image? Before answering this question, let us in the meantime go back to Table 1 and look at the Total row. We can see that, generally, our subjects' self is anchored mostly in such categories as school⁷, name or similar reference to oneself without name, sex, the family, human being and age, in that order. These are the major social axes in which they locate themselves. Among them, human being is the only category that goes beyond the individual's immediate social environment. What makes it such a prominent axis of self-identification is quite perplexing. But one thing is certain: it is only a very general universe and does not constitute a potential threat to other major social groupings in competing for an individual's loyalty. For those that do pose a threat, such as one's resident country (Hong Kong), national origin (China), race, religion, social class, and place of origin, etc., their percentages are quite small -- none of them succeeds in claiming more than one-fourth of our subjects.

7 The exceptional high percentage of self-identification in terms of school roles can be taken as somewhat biased by the testing situation. Tucker (1966) has already pointed out that one of the inherent limitations of the Twenty Statements Test is that the responses it elicited can be susceptible to situational influences. Since our subjects responded to the questionnaire in classroom, dressed in school uniform, it is quite possible that the exceptional high percentage of self-identifications in terms of school roles is caused by such situational factors, although the extent of their influences cannot be precisely determined.

Of particular interest is the obscure impact of Hong Kong on our subjects' self-identification. If the column of Hong Kong is compared with that of China, we can see that except for the age-group of 9-10, the percentage of subjects mentioning Hong Kong is consistently lower than that mentioning China. Moreover, whereas nearly all the entries that go into the China category are statements like "I am a Chinese", those that are classified under the heading of Hong Kong are more heterogeneous in content, including statements such as "I am a Hong Kong citizen", "I live in Hong Kong", and "I was born in Hong Kong", etc. On the whole, our subjects rarely described themselves as a "Hongkongese". Usually, a resident country, with a clear geographical boundary and political sovereignty, is a very favorable candidate for claiming an individual's loyalty and hence constituting a major axis of self-identification. It is especially true when we know that, among our subjects, 91.7% were born in Hong Kong. In a traditional Chinese expression, they "were born here, and were brought up here". Why is their sense of belonging to Hong Kong so weak is indeed an enigma, which deserves a little more elaboration. Far from exhaustive, the following remarks should be enough to make this enigma more comprehensible.

First, although Hong Kong was ceded to Britain in 1842, for many years it remained as an entreport. The

population is very unstable, composed mainly of immigrants from Mainland China who only planned for a temporary settlement and aimed at short-term economic goal. Their social and psychological roots were tied to their hometowns. It was not until the Korean War when the so called "iron curtain" was laid between Hong Kong and Mainland China that the constant flux of population movement virtually came to a halt. However, for various reasons, the psychological mentality of the people in Hong Kong had never been stabilized. In the 50's when the Kuomintang's yearning to recovering the Mainland was received more than a slogan, they longed to go back to their place of origin some days. As soon as they realized that this dream would never come true, the shadow of a communist takeover surged through. Especially after the political turmoil in 1967, emigration routes, leading mostly to North America, were packed with people at each other's heels. For the lower class majority that emigration is beyond their imagination they may consider to stay in Hong Kong for good⁸. However, trapped in a paradox of fearing the communist takeover⁹ on

8 According to Lau (1977), 68.8% of the respondents in his study indicated that, either most probably or definitely, they will stay in Hong Kong permanently.

9 Also in Lau's study (1977), he established that 81.6% of the respondents do not prefer any communist takeover of Hong Kong, while only 0.7% of them express that preference.

the one hand, and having no other alternative but to stay in Hong Kong permanently on the other, these people console themselves, perhaps quite unconsciously, by burying their heads in a limited time horizon, looking forward to no more than, say, five years ahead. Under this circumstance, they share with the economically-better-off citizens what may be called a tourist mentality which, by definition, is incompatible with the formation of a sense of belonging to the community.

Second, the government usually plays a decisive role in instilling a sense of belonging to its citizens (e.g., Singapore). But in Hong Kong, the tourist mentality mentioned above exists in the minds not only of the people but the British government as well. Consequently, most policies have been designed and implemented in an ad hoc manner. Needless to say, the cultivation of a sense of belonging among its people, which is of fundamental importance from a long-term perspective, is not its primary concern. In the last decade, there had been isolated efforts, aiming at this goal (e.g. the Hong Kong Festival). But, given the absence of a whole-hearted patronage from the government and the constraint of financial resources, little has been accomplished over the years.

Third, the identity of being a Chinese is a suppressing factor for the emergence of a sense of belonging to Hong Kong. Because of the British government's

indifference to cultivate a sense of identification with the Hong Kong community, unlike Singapore, it has never launched any systematic campaign deliberately designed to dismantle the Chinese identity of its people. On the contrary, Chinese history and geography, the temporal and spatial axes for sustaining the Chinese identity, are taught in school, though somewhat outdated in contents and interpretations. Although the Chinese language is discriminated against in favor of English, Chinese traditions and customs are largely respected. This can be illustrated by the fact that government officials, including the governor himself, will participate in the celebration of major Chinese festivals (e.g., the Dragon Boat Festival). Even on such occasion as welcoming the Queen's visit, Chinese traditional arts (e.g., Dragon dance) usually lead the celebration procession.

Despite all these, the Chinese identity is not strong enough to constitute a major axis of self-identification either. Only 20.6% of our subjects indicated they were Chinese in their responses. As a colonial government, if the British authorities are not enthusiastic in cultivating a sense of belonging to Hong Kong, there is no reason to expect them to do anything to encourage the formation of a Chinese identity through political socialization in school. It is well understood that national anthem and flag are important symbols in

articulating one's national consciousness. With the absence of these symbols, the Chinese identity of the Hong Kong people can only be a diffused one, sustained mainly through historical and cultural linkages. The situation is further aggravated by the coexistence of two rival governments, one in Peking the other in Taipei, each claiming political legitimacy over its people. The divided loyalty inevitably weakens the sense of belonging.

Race, a major social identity in many societies, is barely perceptible among our subjects, with 2.9% describing themselves in racial or ethnic terms. Consciousness of one's own race becomes acute only in societies where racial conflicts pose a serious problem, such as the U.S. In Hong Kong, so far no major social conflict has originated from racial or ethnic differences. The white minority lives on top of the society. But because of their small number, their existence is barely perceptible in the eyes of the Chinese majority in their daily encounters. Also because of their number, they cannot afford to discriminate against local Chinese, at least explicitly, on racial grounds. In Hong Kong, so far no voluntary club or association has closed the door for other races. Although the white minority tend to concentrate on certain residential areas, they share neighborhoods with upper-class or upper-middle-class Chinese. Therefore, we can say that social and cultural segregations exist between different socio-economic

strata rather than between different races.¹⁰ In the past, the local Cantonese used to discriminate against other Chinese ethnic minorities (e.g., Chiu Chow). However, partly because of the absence of a physical basis for differentiation and partly through the assimilation process that is going on in school, mass media, and other social avenues, the boundary between the Cantonese and other Chinese ethnic minorities has virtually been wiped out in the younger generation.

Religion is not a dominant facet of life in Hong Kong either. Traditional religious rituals and practices are constantly observed by the Chinese majority, but their orientation is a diffused one, as so aptly characterised by C.K. Yang (1961). Under the influence of the Western missionaries, who nearly monopolized the secondary education in Hong Kong, 59.4% of our respondents are religious believers, mostly Protestants and Catholics. However, as shown in Table 1, only 15% of our subjects identified themselves with religious categories, including non-religious indications, such as "I am not a religious believer". The reason is that religious indoctrination, though ubiquitous in schools run by religious organizations, is far from intensive. Hong Kong is a highly competitive

10 For a more detailed analysis, see Lau (1977), especially p.31.

society. Whatever values dominate society also dominate school. While the competition for a good result in the School Certificate Education Examination is so keen, religious practices in many schools have been reduced to the minimum and remained largely as protocol and decorations.

Despite Marx's contention that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles, social class does not constitute a major component in our subjects' self-image. Only 3.7% identified themselves in terms of social class background. All of these statements, however, look like "I was born in a poor family", or "I belong to a middle-upper family". Strictly speaking, these are but expressions of socio-economic status, the substitute for social class in Western sociology. This is not to deny the existence of social classes in the Hong Kong society. But, as Marx pointed out, they exist at two levels, i.e., the subjective and the objective. Whatever the objective conditions, our data indicate that subjective class consciousness has not been formed among our respondents.

The small percentage of self-identification with place of origin (5.1%) signals the passing away of the traditional agrarian mentality. As Fei (1970) observed, rural society is characterised by an earth-bound value orientation. The phrase "落葉歸根" (All fallen leaves

of a tree come back to its roots) is a familiar expression. For business or for livelihood, an individual may spend most of his life time in foreign places, but his social and psychological roots are tied to his homeland. Even after he dies, he hopes that his body will be sent back there for burial. This is a social solidarity based on geographical territory. Traces of this type of solidarity are still discernible in Hong Kong, as can be evidenced by the existence of so many hometown organizations. But most of them fell into oblivion as soon as they came into existence, remaining more as living fossils than as functioning organisms. On the other hand, a new type of earth-bound mentality emerges, as indicated by a 12.6% of our subjects who mentioned the place they live in their self-identification. But in a highly modernized city like Hong Kong where physical and social mobility are frequent, geographical location can hardly serve as a solid ground for personal identity.

While participation in voluntary associations is a major characteristic of modern life, only 3.7% of our subjects identified themselves in terms of memberships in voluntary associations, most of which revolving around extra-curricular activities in school. It is true that, as students, our subjects are preoccupied with studying and hence that their participation in voluntary associations may not be as important in their life as in the life of adults.

However, there are indications that the apathy of participation in voluntary organizations is a reflection of the whole society, instead of being restricted to the student population. In Lau's study (1977:133-136) mentioned above, it was found that only 19.6% of the grown-up adults in Hong Kong have joined voluntary associations of any kind, as compared to 84% in a Midwestern state in the U.S. and that those who join two voluntary associations or less represent 89.4% of all the joiners. Lau also indicated that among the voluntary organizations joined, many are closely connected with familistic relationship (such as clan and locality association), or with the requirement of one's job (e.g., trade unions). These figures clearly show that participation in voluntary associations is not a major facet of the daily life of the Hong Kong people.

I have just shown, in a sketchy way, the non-existence of any viable social group that lies beyond the purview of our subjects' immediate daily activities. Because of this, the ego-extension tendency of our subjects cannot continue to flourish in a proper environment. In other words, they are socially malnourished. Gradually and inevitably, the social base of our subjects' self-concept shrinks back to their immediate environment, i.e., the nuclear family and school. But school is only a transient stage in their life. Once they graduate, I am afraid that the only major social axis in the individual's self is the nuclear family. But

our data in Table 1 show that even the frequency of mentioning family roles in our subjects' responses has been declining since the age of thirteen. I am afraid that the trend is to recede to the individual himself. This is by no means a morally healthy state, as Durkheim made it clear that "the domain of the moral begins where the domain of the social begins" (1963:60) and that "there is no truly moral force save that involved in attachment to a group" (1963:82). Unless systematic efforts were directed to advert the trend, one of the foremost crises in this society will be a moral crisis -- the non-attachment of its citizens to any social group, resulting in a state of massive demoralization whereby the maintenance of social order will be more heavily relied on law enforcement than ever before.

Concluding Remarks:

Like any study, the present research suffers from many limitations. To expose the major ones will help to chart the course of future investigations in this area. First, because different age groups comprise of different individuals, this is not a longitudinal study in the strict sense. Therefore, the present research harbors an assumption that background characteristics other than that suggested are either randomly distributed or not responsible for accounting the pattern of self-development as previously

reported. The acceptability of my interpretations of the research results are therefore contingent upon whether this assumption holds true. Second, as mentioned, the sample of this study is not a probability sample. Although sometimes a nonprobability sample may turn out to be very representative, there is no way to determine to degree of confidence we have over that sample. Therefore, a replication of the present study with a probability sample is desirable if practically possible. Third, I have made some value judgements in the latter part of this article, i.e., the retreat to individualism is given a deprecatory evaluation. However, this is not a violation of the value-free principle. This principle should and can be upheld only in the process of research design and data collection. For the part of interpretation of research findings, the author is free to bring forth his value judgements. Indeed, serious doubts have been raised as to whether biases can be avoided at all in the whole process of doing social science research. The utmost we can do, therefore, is to expose one's own biases.

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