

*Exploration of the Relationship Between Housing Conditions
and Cultural Capital in Hong Kong*

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The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2022
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Due to the over-population and less land supply, the housing condition in Hong Kong is undersupplied, which leads to nearly 30% were under 25 lived in subdivided flats. Till now, no research study examined the cultural capital and housing conditions among the youngsters. Therefore, this study aims to i) explore the characteristics among the subdivided flats residents; ii) compare the difference in cultural capital in different housing types. 288 respondents were recruited in a cross-sectional quantitative study. The Cultural Capital Scale and socio-demographic factors were collected by self-reported questionnaires. Regarding the family income, 52.4% of respondents earned less than 40,000 HKD. According to the results of ANOVA, there were significant differences in cultural capital between the types of housing, $F(3, 279) = 33.73, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses were conducted using LSD. The cultural capital in the subdivided flats group ($M = 45.39, SD = 5.21$) was significantly less than in the public housing group ($M = 77.48, SD = 17.16$), Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) group ($M = 82.38, SD = 12.82$) and private housing group ($M = 82.01, SD = 14.16$). This study provided an insight for advocators and policy makers that more social resources should be allocated to the individuals who are in need.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, Housing, Subdivided Flats, Hong Kong

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Introduction

In Hong Kong, there were basically three types of housing, namely public rental housing (PRH), subsidized sale flats - Home Ownership Scheme (HOS), and private housing. Public rental housing shares a similar concept to social housing in other countries. For subsidized sale flats, they are sold by the Hong Kong government and their cooperated construction companies at a price lower than private housing. According to the report from the Hong Kong government, there are two main issues of housing, which refer to the surging property prices and the shortage of housing supply. The housing prices increasingly rise to an unaffordable level and step further increased the demand for public housing. Statistics from Hong Kong Housing Authority (2022) showed that about 15 thousand families are waiting for government-supported public rental housing. In other words, the supply of public housing is more and more demanding.

Current situation of Housing in Hong Kong and worldwide

It is well known that “a huge population on very scarce land” is a common social phenomenon in Hong Kong. Whether public or private housing, the housing is smaller and smaller. A subdivided flat is the smallest housing unit in Hong Kong which only contains 6.6 square meters on average per unit (Wong, 2016 April 29). Compared with subdivided flats, the average size of private housing is about 16 square meters per unit (Wong, 2016 April 29), which is two times larger, with 13 square meters on average per unit (Transport and Housing Bureau, 2021). On the other hand, compared to other countries, such as Japan, Singapore, Shenzhen (a city located in South China) and the USA, the USA has the largest average size of housing per unit, about 74 square meters (Wong, 2016 April 29), whereas Hong Kong has the smallest average size of housing units among the developed countries and regions.

Although the SDUs are extremely small and may not be appropriate for people to live in, there are 226 thousand people living in SDUs (Transport and Housing Bureau, 2021). According to the government report in 2021, SDUs account for around 3.5% of the total properties, and SDUs are small with a sky-high price, the monthly rental payment of SDUs is around 611 USD. In this way, the people who are living in SDUs suffer a lot in different aspects.

Literature review

Function of Housing

From a social stratification perspective, housing is not only an important property but also emphasizes the strong function of social position. In other words, it represents housing conditions as a symbol of income and aspiration (Bourdieu, 2005; Silva & Wright, 2009). Basically, a housing unit reflects the owner’s social being and taste, which may include economic, social, historical and cultural concerns (Bourdieu, 2005). On the other hand, from a material perspective, the housing location in the city, the layout of the rooms, the creature comforts, and the good or bad maintenance (DeCerteau et al., 1998) also be taken under consideration. Moreover, the price of houses is also a symbol or indicator that represents the owner’s socioeconomic status, and position in society through the equity principle of the material and the symbolic positions. Based on the above literature and from different perspectives, a housing unit is not simply an actual property or an investment for the owner’s

future, or the future generations, but is also highly related to the social position (Silva & Wright, 2009).

Cultural capital

The concept of cultural capital was first introduced by Bourdieu (1986) which was defined as "can be saved, transmitted, invested, and used to obtain other resources". There are basically two forms of cultural capital, namely, tangible and intangible. Tangible form means the cultural goods involving human creativity with symbolic meanings, such as artworks, paintings and sculptures, etc. (Silva & Wright, 2009). On the other hand, the intangible form of cultural capital refers to assets that are embodied, stored and provided cultural values in economic exchange, such as music, literature, values, and beliefs (Silva & Wright, 2009). In general, both tangible and intangible forms of cultural capital occur economic and cultural values (Silva & Wright, 2009).

The previous studies stressed the importance of housing conditions and cultural capital in human life (e.g. Bramley & Kofi Karley, 2007; Harkness & Newman, 2003; Sigle-Rushton, 2004). For instance, research indicated that the higher occupational level, the higher level of housing affordability (Harkness & Newman, 2003). Scholars also found that different standards of home maintenance and repairs between owner occupants and absentee owners, could affect children's health, cognitive and school development differently (Bramley & Kofi Karley, 2007). Research studies indicated that home-ownership is associated with better educational outcomes for their children (Haurin et al., 2002). In detail, the financial stake in the property of the home-owner would have a greater motivation to regulate their children's behavior (Haurin et al., 2002). Moreover, according to previous studies from the U.K., the individuals who were growing up in social housing, would be more likely to suffer adverse outcomes in their later life, such as unemployment, unsatisfied qualification and low income, etc.

Methodology

Research design

In light of the previous literature, there were two aims included in this study: i) to explore how different housing conditions affect cultural capital, and ii) to examine the difference in cultural capital in different housing conditions. The present study is a quantitative research study. Convenient sampling was employed to recruit the target participants. All undergraduate students were recruited from different local universities or colleges. The inclusion criteria are as follows: i) aged 18 or above, ii) able to read Chinese, and iii) Hong Kong residents. The valid cases in this study were 288.

Measurement

Demographic information. The demographic information such as gender, age, living condition and monthly income is collected from the participants.

Cultural capital. To measure participants' cultural capital, the cultural capital scale is used (Khodadady & Natanzi, 2012). The cultural capital scale is a 5 points scale with 27 items and eight sub-scales: i) cultured family, ii) cultural commitment, iii) cultural investment, iv)

religious commitment, v) cultural visits, vi) art visits, vii) art appreciation, and viii) literate family.

Data analysis

Firstly, the frequency and descriptive statistics were used to present the demographic information. Secondly, ANOVA with the post-hoc test was adopted to explore the relationship between different living conditions and cultural capital. The interval confidence and significant level were estimated as 95% and 5% respectively.

Results

Results showed that 61% of participants were female, and 39% were male. 38.8% of participants were living in private housing, 35.9% of them were living in public housing, 18.9% were living in subsidized housing, and only 6.4% of participants were living in the SDUs. Moreover, only 24.9% of participants' family income is lower than 25,000 HKD. Nearly half of the participants' monthly family income is over 40,000 HKD.

The results were conducted by ANOVA with a post-hoc test. Tukey was selected for the post-hoc test in the present study. Firstly, there is a significant difference in cultural capital in different housing conditions, $F(3, 279) = 33.73, p < .001$. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between i) subdivided flat and public housing ($p < .001$); ii) subdivided flat and HOS ($p < .001$); and iii) subdivided flat and private housing ($p < .001$). However, there was no significant difference between public housing, HOS and private housing in the cultural capital. Moreover, subdivided flat residents scored the lowest scores in cultural capital.

After conducting the analysis, most of the results showed that there were significant differences between subdivided flats to public housing, HOS, and private housing. Moreover, all results showed that subdivided flat residents had the lowest scores in all sub-scales when compared to other housing conditions.

Discussion

In general, there was no significant difference between public housing, HOS and private housing in the cultural capital. At the same time, public housing, HOS and private housing had almost two-fold scoring in cultural capital than the subdivided flat residents in Hong Kong. The results showed that SDU's residents had the lowest scores in all aspects of cultural capital, especially on art appreciation, cultural commitment, and literate family. According to some previous studies (Hobcrafe, 2002; Sigle-Rushton, 2004), it was assumed that there were some adverse consequences to growing social housing (or is called public housing in HK). However, the present study wasn't consistent with the previous studies.

Weber and Friedrich's location theory (1929) focused on the site selection for factories due to the cost-effectiveness of the transportation costs, and later, it extended the content to the estate site selection, which focuses on the concept of "the location of economic activity". The theory pointed out that the authorities are more likely to reverse the most valuable site to the most valuable residents, such as the private housing residents (Weber & Friedrich, 1929). Based on this theoretical interpretation, it was assumed that there were some differences between the residents in private and public (social) housing. However, there was no

significant difference between public housing residents and private housing residents in the cultural capital.

To review the housing policies in Hong Kong, it had a building ratio of private and public (social) housing on the same site (land), the common ratio should be 6:4 (public: private) and will be adjusted to 7:3 in the future (Transport and Housing Bureau, 2021). In this way, whether the residents were living in public housing or private housing, they were living in the same community. They might share the similar, or even the same facilities and transportation, etc. According to the differential association theory (Sutherland, 1939), the frequency and intensity of interaction between different groups might lead to a learning process. This behavioral learning process would occur via interaction and contact, which also refers to a two-way learning process. In other words, the public and private housing residents were learning from each other. Therefore, the balance status of public and private housing residents would eventually occur. Thus, the difference in cultural capital was narrowed down between the public housing residents and private housing residents. In short, there was no significant difference in cultural capital.

In light of that, the subdivided flat residents might also share the same community; and share alike or the same facilities and transportation, why do they only get the lowest scores in the presented study? From the materials perspective, SDUs residents might show some difficulties in space utilization. For instance, they have no independent bedrooms, bathroom and kitchen (even no doors or partitions), no telephone connection and internet access, and no private space for each family member. In other words, their living conditions may not benefit from cultural cultivation and accumulation. On the other hand, SDUs residents were mostly working class, with long working hours, no leisure time, and no time for improving their literacy, eventually, they were unable to improve their living conditions.

Conclusion

There are two limitations to this study. Firstly, this study adopted convenient sampling for recruitment, and secondly, the sample size of the present study was small, which represented that the sample might not be representative enough in this study. For further study, employing a more reliable sampling method, and increasing the sample size should be the reasonable means to increase the representativeness of the data.

In conclusion, this study explored the association between housing conditions and cultural capital in Hong Kong. It is also found that the situation in Hong Kong does not show consistency with the previous conclusion drawn from location theory and previous studies. On the other hand, from a materials perspective, the space utilization in SDUs is poor. Most of SDUs' residents lack "space" for cultural development. Moreover, the characteristics of SDU residents further lead to the result of lack of chance to improve their living conditions.

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