

Hong Kong's core values

Hong Kong people are said to be **materialistic** – just look at our **obsession** with the number ‘8’, which is seen as lucky just because it rhymes with the word ‘rich’ in Cantonese. But a recent survey discloses a different picture of our aspirations

DO Hong Kong people value only money and material gain? A recent survey throws light on this question.

To find out what local people treasure most, the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese University asked about their core values.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement towards 11 Hong Kong core values. The results showed that most people go for “rule of law” (92.7%) and “just and corruption-free” (92.3%), with “social stability” (88.2%) and “freedom” (88.1%) following closely.

The rating of the remaining core values were “peace and **benevolence**” (87.4%), “**safeguard** individual property” (86.5%), “level playing field” (86.3%), “family” (84.3%), “democracy” (83.2%), “diversity and tolerance” (79.8%) and “market economy” (76.5%).

“Rule of law” also came first in terms of importance, followed by “freedom”, “just and corruption-free” and “democracy.” Economic and personal property related values were much lower on the scale.

Is money your top priority?

Agree or disagree with these statements.

1	Future earning potential is the key to choosing a university course.	Yes/No
2	It is a waste for a straight A student to go on and become a bus driver.	Yes/No
3	It is all right for people to flip new iPhones for a quick profit.	Yes/No
4	Those earning less than HK\$14,000 a month should have no right to vote.	Yes/No
5	We should just build over the historic site found while constructing the Sha Tin-Central line as it is small. Economic progress is king.	Yes/No
6	People took part in the Occupy Movement because they were paid to do so.	Yes/No
7	We should sympathise with shops near the Occupy protest sites as their business suffered.	Yes/No
8	Problems that can be solved by money are not real problems. The more ‘Yes’ answers you have, the more important money is to you.	Yes/No

Money rules?

IT is, therefore, not true to say that “money is everything” in Hong Kong. People here clearly care more about many other things than money.

There may have been a time in Hong Kong society when people judged each other by their outward appearance, and respect could only be bought by money. But that was decades ago when life was hard and people were living hand-to-mouth.

Our society has changed much since those difficult years and our citizens no longer seek mere **subsistence**, but aspire to higher goals in life.

So when Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying associated income level with voting rights and put undue emphasis on economic **contributions** when talking about various sectors, he drew flak thick and fast.

Fairness, justice and equality – irrespective of

economic status – have become generally accepted values in our society. Hence, it is considered repugnant to suggest that poor people should have a lesser say in community affairs.

What money cannot buy

WE need money to survive. Having a roof over our head, putting food on the table and supporting our family all require money.

But Baptist University Department of Religion and Philosophy (浸會大學宗教及哲學系) professor Chan Sun-hing (陳慎慶) reminds us of money’s limitations. “Money lets us build a rich material life, but that does not necessarily make us happy,” he says.

“Imagine your family enjoys a good income, but all your schoolmates are unreasonable and have no sense of right and wrong. In the community, the justice system is fraught with corruption, and there is no fairness. Would you want to live in such a society?” he asks.

Universal values and the spirit of humanity

BEHIND every harmonious society is a set of common values. A decade ago, the then United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan explained the reason. “Every society needs to be bound together by common values, so that its members know what to expect of each other, and have some shared principles by which to manage their differences without resorting to violence.”

Universal values are those values that should be shared by the whole world. These, Annan noted, include peace, freedom, social progress, equal rights and human dignity, values that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (聯合國憲章) and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (世界人權宣言).

The spirit of humanity, meanwhile, refers to care and respect for life and freedom. In a society that embraces universal values and the spirit of humanity, every member can feel safe and respected, and has room to realise his or her goals.

Building positive values

THERE are numerous sources that create and shape the values of an individual, and collectively, of a society.

Parents and the family are the major influences during childhood. Then school, media, religion, as well as economic and political lives, contribute to the building of the value system.

The values of a person, a society or even an entire generation could shift over time. Traumatic events, such as the June 4 incident or the SARS epidemic, are often catalysts for such changes. ▼

Critical Questions:

1. Do you agree that Hong Kong people are materialistic?
2. What is the most important thing in life to you?

References:

1. [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/)
www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/
2. [What are your values?](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm)
www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm
3. [How to define your personal values](http://www.wikihow.com/Define-Your-Personal-Values)
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Contributing to society

DIFFERENT sectors contribute to society in different ways.

Some of the contributions are **tangible** and can be measured in monetary terms. These include the financial, commercial, industrial, trading or service sectors, which have direct impacts on the economy.

Other sectors make contributions that are intangible but are just as, or even more, important.

The religious sector, for example, guides the people spiritually. The cultural sector enriches people’s lives and minds and gives a country soft power. A robust creative industry strengthens competitiveness. In Hong Kong, the book fair every summer – an iconic event – has become an integral part of our city life.

The sports sector, meanwhile, enhances the public’s health as well as the internal **cohesion** of the community – remember the collective sense of pride and joy we feel when we see our athletes doing well in international events.