

INTERROGATING THE CONDITIONS FOR THE POLITICAL COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION – THE CASE OF HONG KONG

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MEDICAL COUNCIL REFORM IN 2016

**Open Confrontation between the
State and the Medical Profession**

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POLITICS OF THE DOUBLE BED

- The political nature of healthcare
- The state and the medical profession as two major stakeholders of healthcare policy and reform
- Mutual dependency between the state and the medical profession
- The state depends on the medical profession to protect and enhance the health of the population
- The medical profession depends on the state for licensing and funding

THE CASE OF HONG KONG

- The Hong Kong Medical Association (HKMA) is not the only organization representing the medical profession.
- But it has the oldest history and the biggest membership at present.
- It claims to have over 10,000 members from all sectors of medical practice.
- The HKMA led the sit-in protest against the Medical Council Reform.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HKMA AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS ONCE VERY GOOD

- The President of HKMA (1988-1992), Dr Leong Che-hung, was appointed into the Legislative Council (1988-2000) and the Executive Council (2005-2012).
- Council Members were appointed into various consultative committees of the government.
- The HKMA was proud of its positive relationship with the government.

- “Relations with the Government of Hong Kong have always been cordial, based on mutual respect and the understanding that both were here for the good of the public. As one Director of Medical & Health Service had phrased it, ‘we can always agree to disagree’” (Mao 1995: 47).

Mao, Wen Chee Philip. 1995. “A history of the Hong Kong Chinese Medical Association,” *75th Anniversary Commemorative Publication*. Hong Kong Medical Association. Pp. 46-50.

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THE MEDICAL PROFESSION REMAINS IN A VERY PRIVILEGED POSITION TODAY

- This privileged position of the medical profession is augmented by the undersupply of medical doctors since 1997.

THE RATIO OF MEDICAL DOCTORS PER 1,000 PEOPLE

- 1.9 (Hong Kong 2015)
- 3.7 (UK 2014)
- 2.3 (US 2013)
- 2.3 (Japan 2012)
- 2.6 (South Korea 2013)
- 3.0 (Singapore 2014)

WHY DOES THE MEDICAL PROFESSION TURN TO OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT EVENTUALLY?

- Because it has been suffering since the establishment of the Hospital Authority in 1990.

HIGH WORKLOAD OF FRONTLINE DOCTORS

- Protests of public doctors about long work hours in 2000.
- Dr Leung Ka-lau of the Public Doctors' Association sued the Hospital Authority for compensation concerning doctors' on-call duties.
- Dr Leung also won the Legislative Council election in 2008.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE IMBALANCE

- The public sector takes 90% of the market share.
- The public sector also provides more than 80% of all hospital beds.
- However, not so many doctors stay in the public sector.
- Today, there are actually more doctors in the private sector than in the public sector.

THE RESULT OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE IMBALANCE

- Result: 0.9 doctors per thousand population in the public sector, and 9.2 doctors per thousand population in the private sector

THE JUNIOR DOCTORS SUFFERED IN PARTICULAR

- Many of them are in the public sector.
- These doctors suffer from long work hours.

PRIVATE DOCTORS DO NOT FARE MUCH BETTER

- Some specialists made a lot of money.
- But the former President of HKMA warned about the oversupply of specialists in the private sector.

CONTROVERSY ABOUT MEDICAL COUNCIL REFORM IN 2016

- Protectionism of the medical profession?
- Or the suffering of the medical profession?

WHAT EXPLAINS THE MEDICAL PROFESSION'S TURN TO OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT?

- The aggravation of the problem of public-private imbalance is a significant reason.
- In turn, the problem of public-private imbalance must be traced to the myopic vision of the state, especially during the colonial ear.
- To conclude, the political collaboration between the state and the medical profession depends.
- The government's healthcare policy matters.



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