PLK's tradition of protecting children and women

Po Leung Kuk, a non-government organization, was set up in 1878. Its primary aim was to suppress abduction of women and children and provide shelter and education for the victims. Adapting to the changing needs of the growing society of Hong Kong, the primary aim underwent gradual transformation. It became the pursuit of the mission of “protecting the young and the innocent”. This mission has been upheld for more than 100 years, and implemented persistently under modern and highly cost-effective management. Nowadays, Po Leung Kuk is still providing professional, quality and multi-facet social services to the changing society of Hong Kong. In this report, we are going to trace its development in the light of its mission and evaluate its significance in the history of Hong Kong.

The founders of the Po Leung Kuk were a group of committee members from the Tung Wah Hospital. There were three major reasons for setting up this non-government organization. First, since there were serious crimes, especially kidnapping cases in the late 19th century, the Po Leung Kuk was set up to rescue and protect the kidnapped victims. In the 1870s, the kidnapping and selling of humans was very popular in Hong Kong. The kidnappers made use of Hong Kong’s characteristic as a trading port, using stick-and-carrot means to sell women and children overseas. These victims were sold as prostitutes, slaves or child servants and were forced to be separated from their families. Besides, the alternate flood and drought in China at that time had led to poverty and crime, as well as an increase in the number of kidnapping cases. Therefore, on 8th November 1878, a group of local Chinese presented a petition to the Governor, Sir John Pope Hennessy, for permission to set up a society, later known as the Po Leung Kuk (literally “protect the innocent society”), or the Society for the Protection of Women and Children, to rescue and protect the kidnapped victims. They asked for authority to employ detectives, offer rewards for arrests, and returned the victims to their homes.

Second, due to the criticism against the Tung Wah’s engagement in non-medical functions, the Po Leung Kuk was established to sustain those functions. At the time, the Tung Wah Hospital was already performing those functions. However, the Tung Wah had been criticized in the English-language press for engaging in non-medical functions, and its “true nature” had been doubted, so the Po Leung Kuk was set up in an effort to carry on those functions.

Third, another reason for setting up Po Leung Kuk was that there was an outcry among the Chinese after the introduction of Ordinance 2 of 1875. At that time, having muisai, concubine and prostitute was very common in the Hong Kong society as women had low
social status. Women’s rights and freedom were not respected. Later, the government had the introduction of Ordinance 2 of 1875, which made any sale of human beings criminal. It was directed not only at kidnapping and the sale of “pigs” and women for prostitution, but at the buying and selling of human beings in every form. This law, however, had brought about an outcry among the Chinese, since the sale of persons had been a traditional custom and social practice in the Chinese society, most people were not supporting this ordinance. Therefore, the Po Leung Kuk was set up to protect and help those women who were being sold and maltreated.

In this regard, Governor Hennessy played an important role in making the formation of Po Leung Kuk possible. He granted permission to the promoters to organize and carry out their plans provisionally even before he wrote to London for approval. Due to Hennessy’s lavish recommendation, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley, finally approved of the Society though he remained cautious. Because of his fear that the Society might become too powerful, he suggested that it did not need to be constituted by special ordinance. Hence, the Po Leung Kuk failed to gain the legal status as its promoters had hoped for, and remained a junior associate of the Hospital.

When Po Leung Kuk was set up before the post-WWII period, it usually helped to solve the problem of abduction and maltreatment of women and children. It included arresting abductors, arranging marriage for the maltreated women and settling family disputes as to maintain its aim of “protecting the young and the innocent”. In post-WWII period, the problem of abduction and maltreatment of woman and children had basically improved. Po Leung Kuk then noticed the importance of education for those children. Therefore, Po Leung Kuk adjusted its service to focus on educational development and sustained its goal in a different way from before.

In 1946, the efforts paid were rewarded with the approval in setting up primary and preschool classes given by the Education Bureau. Moreover, allowance was given as to ensure that all children sheltered by Po Leung Kuk had the chances to receive education. As time went by, the educational service provided by Po Leung Kuk had gradually developed. Not only Po Leung Kuk primary school was built, operation funds were also raised to arrange freely charged night schools to relieve those poor children who obliged to discontinue schooling. The educational service provided by the Po Leung Kuk was welcomed by the public and received lots of support. It enabled Po Leung Kuk to sustain and promote its service for all children, including those who were not sheltered by Po Leung Kuk, and this set

1《香港保良局百年史略》(Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 1978), p.135
2《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》(Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004), p.60.
a firm and solid base for the later development.

In 1950s-1960s, tens of thousands of families emigrated from the mainland to Hong Kong and the population of Hong Kong had increased tremendously. A large number of the immigrants were children and adolescence who were of school age. To cooperate with the government policy, the premier of Po Leung Kuk decided to found primary schools. During 1971, when the government adopted the free primary educational service, Po Leung Kuk had already owned five primary schools and the number of students were over seven thousands.\(^3\) In the same year, the premier of Po Leung Kuk raised funds to build the first grammatical secondary of Po Leung Kuk in Tsz Wan Shan which is Po Leung Kuk No.1 W.H.Cheung College nowadays.\(^4\) All these showed the role played by Po Leung Kuk as a pioneer in educational perspective.

Apart from providing education to normal school-age children, Po Leung Kuk wished to provide accommodation and training for the intelligent challenged children, so as to make sure that they could learn to take good care of themselves and to adapt to the society. In 1977, after the announcement of the first White Paper on Rehabilitation titled 'Integrating the Disabled into the Community: A United Effort', Po Leung Kuk immediately responded to it by asking the Education Bureau to approve its establishment of special schools for intelligent challenged children. In 1979, the first special school in Hong Kong was set up under the control of Po Leung Kuk to provide special education. Until the end of 1980s, four special schools were set up to supply more than 300 academic degrees.\(^5\) In 1980s, with the approval of “1937 Po Leung Kuk regulation” by the Legislative Council in 1937, Po Leung Kuk was officially given the power to provide educational services and affirmed the expansion and development in education. Till 1989, Po Leung Kuk had been operating eight secondary schools, thirteen primary schools and nine kindergartens, including one school that provided pre-vocational training. \(^6\)

Due to the economic transformation in Hong Kong in 1980s-1990s, innovative technology was requested, thus the demand for workers with higher education level in turn increased rapidly. In an effort to follow the trend, the Po Leung Kuk tried to develop muti-dimensional education. In 1991, the only government subsidized in Hong Kong, PLK Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College was set up. In 1996, an educational services center called the PLK

---

\(^3\)《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》 (Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004), p.62.
\(^4\)《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》 (Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004), p.64.
\(^5\)《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》 (Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004), p.64-65.
\(^6\)《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》 (Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004), p.66.
Yim Chee Education Services Center was set up in Tsuen Wan to provide students with different kinds of tutorial classes, counseling classes, interest groups, etc. The Po Leung Kuk later continued to set up educational services centers all around Hong Kong.

For the sake of enhancing the quality of students, the Po Leung Kuk also set up the Education Research and Testing Center in 1997, which concentrated on the research about “Wisdom, Virtue, Honesty and Progress”, and established an encouragement and award scheme to allow students to have entire development. Moreover, after the transfer of Hong Kong’s sovereignty to the People's Republic of China in 1997, the number of students immigrating from China increased rapidly. Due to this condition, the Po Leung Kuk planned some courses about the introduction to Hong Kong, information technology and living skills to help them adapt to their new environment more easily. In 2001, in order to follow the government promotion of creating private independent school, it set up the first private independent school in Hong Kong, PLK Choi Kai Yau School, providing one continuous line service on primary and secondary courses and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. Besides, the Po Leung Kuk established PLK Camões Tan Siu Lin Primary School, the first directly subsidized primary school in Hong Kong and PLK Ngan Po Ling College, and the first directly subsidized English school in 2003.

The adjustments of Po Leung Kuk’s service were made according to the need of the Hong Kong in 1940s-1980s. Po Leung Kuk developed its educational service according to the changes of society and the government policy in the past, and its major effort and concern was changed from helping abduction women and children to nurturing children successfully. In fact, the PLK has made a lot of contribution to the present day community and is still playing an important role in the education sector.

Apart from nurturing local elites, the Po Leung Kuk also put lots of effort in helping the immigrants from the mainland. This history can be traced back to the 1970s in which the Po Leung Kuk provided academic degrees in primary schools for the immigrated school-age children. After the return of Hong Kong’s sovereignty in 1997, the relationship and contact between Hong Kong and the mainland became much closer and there was again an influx of the mainland immigrants. The number of school-age immigrants increased and the Po Leung Kuk initiated a set of immigrant adaptation courses for those newly comers who needed help. Indeed, Po Leung Kuk Portuguese Community School received fund from Education Bureau in 2000 to establish the adaptation courses to corporate with the actual demand for help in Hong Kong. The courses would teach the immigrants some training of living skills, technological information and the most important part, helping them to familiarize with Hong

7 《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》(Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004), p.68
Kong. As a result, the Po Leung Kuk has contributed a lot and is meaningful to the present day community. In addition to the Po Leung Kuk’s protection towards immigrant from the Mainland, it also takes new immigrant from South Asia into account. Schools, like PLK Portuguese Community School, also provide academic degrees for those people. It gives a helping hand towards those students and shows its concern for immigrants from South Asia. Therefore, the Po Leung Kuk put lots of effort in protecting immigrants, especially those from the Mainland and South Asia.

In addition, PLK Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College, one of the post-secondary schools in Hong Kong, has contributed a lot to the society nowadays. In fact, some of the secondary schools in Hong Kong only provide education up till F.5 level. This eventually obliges students studying in these schools to discontinue their schooling. Fortunately, the establishment of PLK Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College provides a chance for those students to continue receiving education. They also have priority for being enrolled, and this in turn increases their chance to receive further education. Besides, PLK Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College collaborates with some overseas universities in providing some post-secondary education programs for the purpose of bridging with overseas university courses. This enhances students’ chance to study overseas and to broaden their horizons. Besides, if students are not willing to study overseas, they also have the chance to study in universities in Hong Kong. This is because the university admission statistics done by PLK Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College reveals that there are 282 and 313 F.7 students being promoted to eight universities, mostly the Hong Kong University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in 2006 and 2007 separately. Therefore, PLK Vicwood K.T. Chong Sixth Form College has furnished much chance to students in Hong Kong to continue their study in universities and receive high quality education and the Po Leung Kuk has made much contributed to the society.

Furthermore, the Po Leung Kuk schools under the direct subsidy scheme also achieve its aim of helping the needy and give birth to a lot of local elites. The Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) is instituted by the Hong Kong Education Bureau as a means to enhance the quality of private schools in Hong Kong at the kindergarten, primary, and secondary levels. An existing DSS school is granted a subsidy based on its operating history; the subsidy is calculated according to the average unit cost for each local student enrolled. The Po Leung Kuk Ngan Po Ling College is the first Po Leung Kuk secondary school under the Direct Subsidy Scheme and had a relatively lower school fee compared to other DSS schools. With the sound tradition of the Po Leung Kuk education policy, the school provides diversified and all-round education for their students and brings out their potential. All-round education is provided in students'
moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development. The mission of the Po Leung Kuk is to provide fine and quality educational services to the youngsters of our society, in accordance with the main objective of the Kuk — “protect the innocent society”. It would focus on the moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development of students, aiming to nurture their knowledge, as well as personality. Besides, the locations of its schools also prove its resolution to serve the deprived citizens. Po Leung Kuk No.1 W.H.Cheung College, the first secondary school set up by the Kuk, is situated in Tsz Wan Shan in New Kowloon, Hong Kong. It is a densely populated residential area with mainly residents of working class, consisting of several large public housing estates, and had been infamous for its large number of crime and youth gangsters in the past. The location of the college, therefore, reveals its intention to specialize in providing education for the needy. Also, the school development plan of the college had stated that most students come from less well-off families, showing its understanding and concern for low-income families. Moreover, the school fee of the schools is also considerably reasonable. For the Ngan Po Ling College, the annual school fee is around $17000, which is affordable for most average-income families, in order not to create a burden for students. In terms of these conditions, The Po Leung Kuk has carried through its aim of helping the needy of the society.

Apart from the educational contribution, the Po Leung Kuk still keeps the tradition of “protecting the young and the innocent” in other aspects. For example, two women refuges, Sunrise Court (commenced operation since March 2003) and Wai On Home for Women were brought into services to provide protection, short-term accommodation and professional services for women and their children who are in danger of domestic violence or having serious personal or family crisis. This truly fulfills the aim of the Po Leung Kuk.

In conclusion, to a larger extent, the Po Leung Kuk has adjusted its services according to the needs of Hong Kong society, extending its services to a wider area and focuses on the category of education. Po Leung Kuk, on one hand, has adjusted a lot according to the need of Hong Kong society and on the other hand, has continue and keeps its aim of “protecting the young and the innocent”, one of the Hong Kong’s spiritual heritages.
**Bibliography**

**Reference books:**
1) 《保良局：一百二十五年周年特刊》 Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 2004
2) 《香港保良局百年史略》 Hong Kong: Po Leung Kuk, 1978

**Web Sites**
3) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Po_Leung_Kuk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Po_Leung_Kuk)
4) [http://www.cky.edu.hk/](http://www.cky.edu.hk/)
5) [http://www.plkno1whc.edu.hk/](http://www.plkno1whc.edu.hk/)
6) [http://www.npl.edu.hk/](http://www.npl.edu.hk/)
7) [http://chsc.edb.hkedcity.net/secondary/](http://chsc.edb.hkedcity.net/secondary/)
9) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_Subsidy_Scheme](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_Subsidy_Scheme)

**Comment:**
The report gave a good account of changes and development of PLK. It tried to explore PLK’s meaning to the community with reference to its aim of protecting the young and the innocent, but the discussion of this very important point was not effective as it was not contextualized into different historical periods of Hong Kong.

評語:
本報告對保良局轉變與發展的描述表現不俗。嘗試以「保赤安良」探討保良局對社區的意義，有關討論有可能引申成一個重要的論點，但未能以香港史不同時期的發展為背景展開討論，因此討論的成效不大。

評級 Level: L3
評分Marks: 11