

MASTER'S THESIS

Organization structure, discourse and women empowerment: a case study of a feminist cooperative in Kwun Tong

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Date of Award:
2009

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**Organization Structure, Discourse
and Women Empowerment—
A Case Study of a Feminist Cooperative in Kwun Tong**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

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Hong Kong Baptist University

August 2009

Abstract

Forming a cooperative is a method that Hong Kong feminists have been using to empower local women since the mid-1990s. The cooperative in this research aims at providing its participants, who are ex-factory female workers and new female immigrants from mainland China and both facing family financial hardships and very limited job opportunities, with working opportunities and bringing their voices and issues into the community.

“Empowerment” denotes a process of social actions widened by life choices and obtaining of self determination. Feminists believe that the increase in women’s social status and fight against gender inequality in society should be achieved through women’s empowerment. The three major empowerment perspectives are derived from economic development, social work and feminism. The economic development perspective emphasizes the empowering of women with a capacity building approach, while the social work perspective stresses a consciousness raising approach. However, the two approaches are not able to ensure women’s empowerment, owing to the unchallenged gender hierarchy. Hence, in the feminist perspective, a gender hierarchy restructuring approach is highlighted, aside from valuing the building of capacities and raising consciousness.

This study researches on a women empowerment programme in an old grassroots district. The programme operates a recycling team/community second hand shop for promoting an environmentally friendly message in the community. Through participant observations and in-depth interviews with programme participants, the complexity of relationships, which is mixed with friendship and discipline between the organizers and participants, are investigated. It is found that the cooperative is a source of both empowerment and disappointment. Participants acknowledge that they are delighted with their built capacities and raised consciousness, while the inharmonious relationships between participants bring discouragement to them. The intertwining of empowerment, indifference and unfulfilment will be discussed in relation to the organization structure of the cooperative and the discourses that are employed. Through examining the impacts of the organization structure and discourses, a power

imbalance between staff and participants, and unequal participation opportunities among members in the programme are discovered. The thesis concludes with a suggestion for solving the negative impacts that the organization structure and discourses bring to women empowerment.

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