

Unflagging support

York Chow says good policies and open minds are needed to keep our babies breastfed for a longer time

Today marks the beginning of World Breastfeeding Week, observed annually to promote and support breastfeeding and the health of infants. This year's theme of working women and breastfeeding provides us with an opportunity to consider how Hong Kong is faring here.

The benefits of breastfeeding, both immediate and long-term, are well recognised. According to the World Health Organisation, which recommends that mums breastfeed exclusively until a child is six months old, this is the "best way" to provide infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth, and also gives them protection from illnesses.

In Hong Kong, these benefits are increasingly being recognised by mothers and families. According to an annual survey conducted by Unicef, the breastfeeding rate upon discharge from maternity units in our city has risen from 19 per cent in 1992 to 84 per cent in 2013.

Nevertheless, exclusive breastfeeding is often not sustained. According to Department of Health statistics, only 22 per cent of Hong Kong babies born in 2012 were exclusively breastfed at the age of one month, with the figure dropping to a mere 2 per cent at the age of six

months. A 2010 study by scholars at the University of Hong Kong found that because mothers were returning to work, they were among those more likely to wean the child from breastfeeding before the age of one month.

We all want to give our children the best possible start in life. Many working mothers wish to breastfeed, but may be unable to do so because of long working hours, a lack of supportive policies, and limited public facilities available for this purpose. As a society, we must do better to enable mothers who wish to breastfeed, especially working women, to do so at any time and in any place. We need stronger policies and infrastructure, including friendly workplace policies, as well as wider acceptance from the community at large.

The Equal Opportunities Commission handles complaints related to breastfeeding under the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance, which makes it unlawful for any employer or provider of goods, facilities or services to the public to discriminate against a person who has family care responsibility in the course of employment or the provision of goods or services. As part of our review of the discrimination laws launched last year, the commission consulted the public on expanding the definition of "family

status" to expressly include breastfeeding women.

It is our belief that this would provide clarity to the existing protection of a woman's right to breastfeed in Hong Kong. We are currently compiling the responses received through this exercise, and will make recommendations to the government in due course.

Another issue is maternity leave. Currently, women are entitled to 10 weeks of statutory maternity leave in Hong Kong. The commission believes the government should consider the policy with reference to the International Labour Organisation. Suitably extending the maternity leave period would enable women to breastfeed for a longer duration.

More promotion is also needed about the benefits of breastfeeding. In fact, many mothers continue to face negative attitudes about breastfeeding, particularly at work and in public. Last year, a photo of a woman breastfeeding her child on a bus, taken without her consent, went viral and sparked a heated discussion about public decency.

It is a mother's right to breastfeed her baby anywhere and at any time. The incident illustrated the need for greater awareness and public education.

The government can certainly lead the charge by being a positive

role model for the private sector. In 2013, the Food and Health Bureau issued a public health advisory to all government bureaus and departments, urging them to implement the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Policy. Suggested supportive measures include permitting lactation breaks during the workday and providing appropriate space and refrigeration facilities. This was a positive step.

Only 22 per cent of HK babies were exclusively breastfed at the age of one month

To communicate a stronger message, the government should ensure that all bureaus and departments have adopted these recommendations, and provide more resources to promote breastfeeding in hospitals to new mothers. It should also make certain that all government and other public premises have breastfeeding and baby-care facilities and rooms. This would help to set a good

example for private property owners and employers.

Indeed, it is in the interest of employers to offer facilities to assist breastfeeding employees. In 2013, women made up 48 per cent of our city's economically active population, and the majority of women of child-bearing age are participating in the labour force. By taking steps that allow new mothers returning to work to breastfeed or express and store breast milk, employers can help retain their female talent and foster staff loyalty.

Aside from providing accommodation measures such as hygienic storage options and private locations for milk expression, employers and managers should also visibly communicate their support for breastfeeding mothers and ensure that workplace policies relating to breastfeeding are clearly laid out and made known to all employees. This can go a long way towards changing any negative misconceptions about breastfeeding in the workplace and in public generally.

Expanding the options for women who would like to breastfeed longer or exclusively would help to provide our children with a healthy beginning to the rest of their lives. For our collective future, we must all work together towards this goal.

Dr York Chow is chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission

Finding depth in Xi's style of governance

Robert Lawrence Kuhn examines the 'Four Comprehensives' – a summary of the president's 'new kind of theory' that underscores the complexity of realising the Chinese Dream

With President Xi Jinping's (习近平) state visit to Washington coming when most China watchers see the country as more autocratic domestically and more aggressive internationally, I've been in Beijing examining Xi's philosophy of governance and his new political theory, the "Four Comprehensives". The context is Xi's vision for "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" – which he calls the Chinese Dream. The target year for its initial realisation is 2020, by when China is supposed to become "a moderately prosperous society".

With the Four Comprehensives, Xi is highlighting what he believes are the four most important policies to make the dream a reality: comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society; comprehensively deepen reform; comprehensively govern the nation according to law; and comprehensively strictly govern the Communist Party.

What is Xi's purpose for unifying the Four Comprehensives now? As I see it, they emerge for two pragmatic purposes: a sober summary of experiences and appraisal of current conditions, and a call to action. As only five years remain until 2020, the Four Comprehensives highlight the complexity of what it will take to achieve the Chinese Dream.

In economic terms, a "moderately prosperous society" has been defined as doubling the 2010 gross domestic product and per capita income. But Xi's vision goes beyond economics and embraces social, cultural and ecological indices.

A senior source said that the Four Comprehensives are a systematic approach to specific actions – not just a new theory, but "a new kind of theory". "The Four Comprehensives are a blueprint for urgent action," he said. "They relate to what is really happening now."

How does "comprehensively" enrich the long-standing goal of a "moderately prosperous society"? With about 82 million people still living in poverty, China must radically reduce imbalances between urban-rural and coastal-inland areas.

The Four Comprehensives emerge for two purposes: an appraisal of conditions, and a call to action

As for 300 million migrant workers – second-class citizens in the cities that they themselves built without access to equal health care, education and retirement benefits – Xi stressed that *hukou* (residency registration) reform should be sped up so that migrants "can live in equality in urban areas".

Urban areas also demand comprehensive development. Take the regional plan to integrate Beijing, Tianjin (天津) and Hebei (河北) province – optimising population growth, traffic management, environmental protection, energy security and industrial upgrades.

The reason that deepening reform, the second comprehensive, is so critical is that reform is now entering "deep waters", where it is no longer possible to advance "stone by stone".

Although the rule of law, the third comprehensive, has long been a central objective in name, it has not worked that way in fact. Xi recognises that without the rule of law in real practice, there can be neither harmony nor stability. Of the many legal reforms in the 4th plenary of the party's 18th Central Committee in October, making the judicial system independent of local government and protected from undue influence was perhaps the most significant.

The fourth comprehensive, "strict discipline in the party", is Xi's hallmark – the goal of both the anti-corruption campaign and quashing the extravagances of officials. They aim to create three attitudes towards corruption: "Don't want. Don't do. Don't dare."

In effecting these policies, China's leaders have multiple objectives. Reducing government power by increasing market power will accelerate reform and reduce corruption. And the anti-corruption campaign purifies the party and breaks up interest groups that resist reform.

To achieve any of the Four Comprehensives is challenging – and all of them more so. But here we are witnessing the crystallisation, augmentation and maturation of Xi's political thinking on governance – and still we may not have its final form.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn is an international corporate strategist and political and economics commentator



Xi's hallmark is the fourth comprehensive of strict discipline in the party. Photo: AFP



Hong Kong should pay native idol Bruce Lee proper homage

Yonden Lhatoo says with the city eager to pull in more tourist dollars, why are we shunning the man who gave Asians face in Hollywood?

A story this newspaper published last week about martial arts icon Bruce Lee got me thinking again about a question that has bothered me for many years: why does Hong Kong shun its most famous son?

The story featured a dedicated fan from San Francisco with an extensive collection of Bruce Lee memorabilia, some of which he has lent to the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. Jeff Chinn spoke of how his idol made it "cool" to be Chinese while growing up in a climate of racial discrimination in the 1970s.

Thank you for reminding us, Jeff Chinn. And let me extend the tribute by declaring that it's not just Chinese people who owe a debt of gratitude to the late kung fu legend. Bruce Lee changed the derogatory perception in the West that Asians were mostly a faceless mob of timid little people to be pitied or pushed around. He gave us respect.

He was a cultural phenomenon who took on a Hollywood film industry that used yellow-face portrayals of Asians – remember John Wayne as Genghis Khan with his eyes taped back to look more "Oriental" in *The Conqueror*? Cinema-goers brought up on a diet of racist stereotypes such as Dr Fu Manchu

and Charlie Chan didn't know what hit them when Lee kicked and punched his way onto the scene. He gave us "face" – dignity and pride in the social context that Asian people understand so well.

And look at us in Hong Kong, still unwilling to pay official tribute to our biggest hero. We can't even name a road after him – Arbutnot, Cadogan, Gutzlaff, Lambeth, pick any name except that of the most recognisable and idolised Hongkonger ever.

A long overdue move to convert his home in Kowloon Tong into a commemorative museum flopped, even after its owner offered to donate it to the government.

And don't mention the statue on the Avenue of Stars – an initiative by dedicated fans, not allergic officials. One of the most prominently displayed statues in this city is the figure in Central's Statue Square. Does anyone even know whose likeness it is? I just found out today, only because I had to look it up for this column: Sir Thomas Jackson, an early HSBC banker. How many people know or care about him, compared with Bruce Lee? I rest my case.

So why does the government continue to treat Lee as persona non grata? Over the years I've

asked quite a few senior officials in this administration as well as previous ones about this unspoken taboo and drawn either a blank or an unconvincing denial.

Bruce Lee experts and fans I've spoken to can only think of the shady circumstances surrounding his death at the home of a mistress in 1973 as the reason for the stigma. Was he poisoned? Were triad gangsters involved? What does it matter? How does it belittle his monumental achievements?

Well-known local musician, entertainment veteran and Bruce Lee fan Anders Nelsson told me it shows how unreasonable the government's "conservative mindset" can be. He agreed with me that it's ridiculous for something like this to hold us back in this day and age when Hong Kong is looking for ideas to attract more tourists. We talk about "Brand Hong Kong" but ignore the biggest brand name this city could capitalise on.

Nelsson recalled how former governor Chris Patten had been quite receptive to his suggestion in 1994 that the road to Hong Kong's airport should be named after Bruce Lee, calling it a "jolly good idea". The powers that be settled for the highly imaginative "Airport Road" instead.

If it were up to me, I would rename our airport after Bruce Lee, with a gigantic sign reading "Enter the Dragon" in the arrival hall. You want to impress visitors? Show them who's *The Big Boss*.

Yonden Lhatoo is a senior editor at the Post

Way to beat market volatility

Linda Yueh says the Chinese stock market will begin to stabilise only if it opens up and builds up a good foundation of institutional investors

China's stock market plunged yet again this week, and the roller-coaster ride is far from over. In fact, China's stock market is more like a casino than an amusement-park attraction. Retail investors account for 85 per cent of the transactions, in contrast with other major markets, where institutional investors – with their relative abundance of information – are the biggest traders.

The result, no surprise, is an extremely volatile market, in which rumour and emotion play an outside role in driving outcomes. And that volatility is the other reason the casino metaphor applies: China's stock market can rise or fall by double digits without triggering a wider economic crash – at least, so far.

This volatility highlights the challenges of ensuring a smooth process of financial liberalisation in China. After extensive government intervention, prices rebounded. Yet intervention is unlikely to prevent another crash.

The reason is that the Chinese stock market is not wholly liquid or globally integrated. Moreover, it is dominated by captive money from Chinese savers – the retail investors. Indeed, it was not until 2009 that most shares on China's stock exchanges were tradable. Until the reforms that began in 2005, two-thirds of shares were non-tradable and held by state-owned enterprises or legal persons, which are typically state-controlled entities.

To be sure, that has led to a

huge infusion of liquidity over just the past few years.

Aside from the very wealthy, the hundreds of millions of ordinary Chinese middle-class savers do not have easy access to global markets. Moreover, returns on deposits are low (and had been negative), and the state-dominated financial system offers few diversified products. As a result, housing and domestic equities are the main investments available to them.

But then the housing market stalled, as fears of a property bubble spurred a government clampdown on credit, leaving the stock market the place for middle-class savers to put their money.

The big question now is whether the recent volatility will spill over into other asset markets and the real economy. The double-digit drop in the Shanghai Composite Index since June has not triggered an economic crisis, largely because fewer than 10 per cent of Chinese households participate in the stock market.

But even a small fraction of Chinese households experiencing paper losses still amounts to tens of millions of people. That has caused enough concern for the government to act.

Until China's stock market opens up and its institutional foundation becomes predictable, volatility will be its only guiding rule.

Linda Yueh is a fellow in economics at St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford. Copyright: Project Syndicate