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## Women In Hong Kong

# Under-represented and undervalued

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Some people feel that the status of women is already very high in Hong Kong, and therefore, there is no need for a civic movement to fight for their rights. I disagree.

In the new 60-seat Legislative Council, only 11 legislators are women. In Tung hee-hwa's Executive Council, only two are women. According to the Census and Statistics Department, only one-quarter of managers and executives in Hong Kong are women. Yet, the majority of low-income earners are women. Median monthly earnings for female workers is \$8,000; for male workers it is \$11,700.

Almost all homemakers are women. Homemakers' domestic work is not counted as economically active work, and they are left out of the Mandatory Provident Fund scheme. Women are under-represented as decision-makers in the public spheres of politics and work. Some people argue that they are not as ambitious or as capable as men. This cannot be true. Women in Hong Kong are as educated as men. Female students account for 54 percent of all enrolments in programmes funded by the University Grants Committee. The percentage share of female students enrolled at sub-degree level is 65 percent. About 44 per cent of the economically active population is women.

Women managers and executives in Hong Kong are twice as likely as their male counterparts to never marry. It appears that marriage and family contribute to a drop in women's share of public roles, but enhance men's importance in the public sphere.

Women and men do not compete on an equal footing. Surveys show that gender roles are still entrenched in Hong Kong. Women are expected to take care of the household, irrespective of whether they are in full-time paid employment. As a result, working women face intense conflict and stress.

In Hong Kong, women are still perceived to be the second sex. A Chinese University study showed that a high proportion of the police force still feels that it is all right for husbands to beat their wives. The majority of victims of sexual harassment are women. Women are still expected to have a "soft" personality.

There is a lot of work to be done to advance women's rights and to support women to be autonomous beings with self-esteem and independent minds.

Yet, funding to women's groups has been dropping. One group in crisis, after 15 years' good work, is the Hong Kong Women Workers' Association. It faces a severe funding

shortage, and might have to close.

It is in this context that a group of women activists has set up a fund to support work that promotes human rights for women in Hong Kong. The HER (Her Empowering Resources) Fund was launched on March 8 to promote feminist philanthropy.

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