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E15 二〇〇五年十二月二十二日 星期三 夏曆辛巳年十月二十八日

論壇

蘋果日報



貧富懸殊不等同貧窮

嶺南大學市場及國際企業學系副教授 呂漢光



傳媒每隔半年至一年，會重複而又頗熱烈地討論貧富懸殊的問題，討論往往把貧富懸殊和貧窮兩個問題混淆一起。筆者希望指出，貧富懸殊和貧窮問題是兩個不同的概念，儘管貧富懸殊擴大，貧窮人口可以增加或減少，因堅尼系數急升，便高喊貧窮問題惡化，是毫不理性的。

家庭收入不可作準

堅尼系數，是眾多貧富懸殊指標中最常用的一個，但解讀有關的數字並不容易，單一看數字的升跌，不能全面了解背後的變化，因為堅尼系數上升時，最低收入的一群，有可能收入有所增加。

堅尼系數只概括表示有關地區人口收入的相對改變，可勉強作為相對貧窮的指標，但絕不能反映貧窮人口的變化。人們心目中的貧窮家庭，泛指家庭收入不足以應付日常生活的支出，是學術上絕對貧窮的定義。

很可惜，香港報刊發表有關貧窮狀況的研究及調查，往往忽略了「相對貧窮」和「絕對貧窮」的分別，因而經常看到香港有超過一百萬窮人的「新聞」。

有關研究或調查所採用的，是「相對貧窮」的標準，一般以入息中位數的一半，或以家庭的人均收入中位數的一半，作為貧窮

線，若入息中位數是一萬元，收入不足五千元，皆列入貧窮大軍。

假設，有一個極富裕的國家，最低收入的百分之三十的工人，月入港幣五萬元，其他人的月薪均超過十萬元，而入息中位數是十一萬元，用相對貧窮的概念，這國家有百分之三十的人口，因收入低於五萬五千元，被界定為窮人。

假若，有一個極窮困的國家，最低收入的百分之四十的工人，月薪只有港幣五百元，而其他工人亦只有八百元月薪，因入息中位數是八百元，貧窮線是月入四百元。奇妙地，這個國家一個窮人也沒有。筆者相信，香港人不會同意上述制訂貧窮線的標準。

若以「絕對貧窮」的概念來制訂貧窮線，首先要研究起居飲食的必要開支，入不敷支的家庭，便界定為貧窮。從理論的層面，以「絕對」貧窮線來研究貧窮問題，是較可靠和理性的，但「絕對貧窮」的概念，知易行難。

例如，政府為一個四人家制定貧窮線，要處理的問題十分複雜。四人家家庭的組合，各成員的年齡、健康、就業或就學的情況、上班或上學的交

通費、就學的班級等，全都直接影響生活的必須開支。其中，長者及幼兒的基本開支比青少年高，大學及幼稚園的學費比中、小學高出許多，為不同的家庭組合，制訂不同的貧窮線，極為困難。

申領綜援可作標準

簡單而劃一的貧窮線，又不切實際，政府不願回應政黨的要求，訂立貧窮的標準，是可以理解的。若一定要計算香港的貧窮人口，筆者認為參考申領綜援的標準，比採用「相對貧窮」的方法，更有說服力。無論如何，貧富懸殊擴大，並不等同窮人增多。



■人們心目中的貧窮家庭，泛指家庭收入不足以應付日常生活的支出，學術上，這是絕對貧窮的定義。

LegCo Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty Meeting on 23 February 2005

Definition of Poverty

LUI Hon-Kwong
(February 4, 2005)

There are no universally accepted definitions of poverty. Broadly speaking, poverty can be defined in absolute and relative terms. In Hong Kong, the most widely used definition of poverty is based on the relative poverty concept. For example, the poverty line could be set at 50% of the median household income.

Coudouel *et al.* (2004) discuss various poverty measures. However, I personally in favour of the absolute poverty approach as adopted by the US Census Bureau (Undated):

“The original poverty definition provided a range of income cutoffs or thresholds adjusted by such factors as family size, sex of the family head, number of children under 18 years old, and farm-nonfarm residence. At the core of this definition of poverty was the economy food plan, the least costly of four nutritionally adequate food plans designed by the Department of Agriculture. It was determined from the Department of Agriculture’s 1955 Household Food Consumption Survey that families of three or more people spent approximately one-third of their after-tax money income on food; accordingly, poverty thresholds for families of three or more people were set at three times the cost of the economy food plan. Different procedures were used to calculate poverty thresholds for two-person families and people living alone in order to compensate for the relatively larger fixed expenses of these smaller units. For two-person families, the cost of the economy food plan was multiplied by a factor of 3.7 (also derived from the 1955 survey). For unrelated individuals (one-person units), no multiplier was used; poverty thresholds were instead calculated as a fixed proportion of the corresponding thresholds for two-person units. Annual updates of these SSA poverty thresholds were based on price changes of the items in the economy food plan.”

Lui (1997) points out that the relative poverty concept is primarily a measure of income disparity. Unfortunately, there is a wide misconception that higher income inequality also means a higher level of poverty. Lui (2001) argues that rising income inequality does not necessarily indicate increasing poverty.

It is unrealistic to define a simple poverty line for all households in Hong Kong. US Census Bureau (2004) adopts a number of poverty thresholds for households of different compositions. If the HKSAR Government determines to analyze the poverty situation, US Census Bureau approach should be adopted.

References

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Poverty Thresholds 2003

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Poverty Thresholds for 2003 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years
(Dollars)

Size of family unit	Weighted average thresholds	Related children under 18 years								
		None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight or more
One person (unrelated individual)										
.....	9,393									
Under 65 years.....	9,573	9,573								
65 years and over.....	8,825	8,825								
Two persons.....	12,015									
Householder under 65 years.....	12,384	12,321	12,682							
Householder 65 years and over.....	11,133	11,122	12,634							
Three persons.....	14,680	14,393	14,810	14,824						
Four persons.....	18,810	18,979	19,289	18,660	18,725					
Five persons.....	22,245	22,887	23,220	22,509	21,959	21,623				
Six persons.....	25,122	26,324	26,429	25,884	25,362	24,586	24,126			
Seven persons.....	28,544	30,289	30,479	29,827	29,372	28,526	27,538	26,454		
Eight persons.....	31,589	33,876	34,175	33,560	33,021	32,256	31,286	30,275	30,019	
Nine persons or more.....	37,656	40,751	40,948	40,404	39,947	39,196	38,163	37,229	36,998	35,572

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2004 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

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Last Revised: August 26, 2004