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Using a time conditions framework to explore the impact of government policies on the commodification of public goods and women's defamilization risks

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IMPACT

This article offers insight into how the commodification of public goods could affect women's lives directly and indirectly through its impact on the family. It draws on the experience in Hong Kong of raising policy-makers' and public sector administrators' awareness of the importance of women's and families' perspectives in policy practice at both the international and national level. The analysis is based on the Hong Kong government's interventions during the Covid 19 pandemic. It shows how the commodification of public goods can affect women and families and create more challenges for them during a global crisis. The article speaks to policy-makers and practitioners involved in policy design and implementation.

ABSTRACT

This article makes contributions to the field of defamilization, discretionary time and the commodification of goods. It introduces the 'time conditions framework' to examine the impact of the government's responses to the commodification of public goods on women's defamilization risks that limit women from performing different family roles. Referring to the Hong Kong government's policies on handling the Covid 19 pandemic, this article explores four issues: how government policies on the commodification of public goods can create unfavourable time conditions for tackling defamilization risks; how these policies can create multiple defamilization risks; how these policies can undermine families' capacity to support women; and how these policies could be revised to address such risks.

KEYWORDS

Commodification of public goods; Covid 19 pandemic; defamilization risks; discretionary time; family; Hong Kong; women

Introduction

This article explores the possibility of links between the studies of defamilization, discretionary time and the commodification of public goods. Despite their potential inter-relatedness, current research in these fields rarely makes such connections. To address this gap, this article has two goals. First, it introduces a new conceptual framework called the 'time-conditions framework' that can help examine the impact of government responses to the commodification of public goods on women's defamilization risks. Second, it demonstrates the practical value of this framework by examining the policies implemented by the Hong Kong government during the Covid 19 pandemic.

To achieve these goals, this article begins by discussing the concepts of defamilization, discretionary time and commodification of public goods. Next, it introduces the structure and values of the time-conditions framework. Finally, it highlights the policy measures taken by the Hong Kong government in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Before delving into the analytical tasks, it is important to explain why we have chosen to focus on the Hong Kong government's responses to the Covid 19 pandemic. The Hong Kong government has been a strong advocate of capitalism, both before and after the region's transition from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under Chinese rule in 1997 (Chau & Yu, 2022; Walker & Wong, 2005). The Basic Law stipulates that social policy development in Hong Kong should align with economic conditions and the government should maintain a

conservative fiscal policy (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, 2021). To adhere to these principles, the Hong Kong government follows the tenets of low taxation and surplus budgeting (Yu & Chau, 2020). Given this context, Hong Kong is a good observation ground for studying how the government promotes the importance of commodity relations.

It is noteworthy that the Hong Kong government supports capitalism not only through long-term policies, such as incentivizing the use of private health services through vouchers and privatizing public railways but also through short-term measures, such as offering a one-time lump sum payment to the public in 2023 to stimulate economic growth by encouraging spending (Yeo, 2021). This demonstrates the Hong Kong government's willingness to exploit various opportunities to bolster the capitalist economy. By examining the Hong Kong government's response to the Covid 19 pandemic, this article reveals that the Hong Kong government's emphasis on promoting commodity relations may be just as significant as safeguarding public health. In the following, how the Hong Kong government has attempted to mitigate the threat of the Covid 19 pandemic by further commodifying public goods is discussed.

Defamilization

Esping-Andersen (1990) categorized 18 OECD countries into three worlds of welfare capitalism based primarily on the

concept of labour decommodification. This concept has often been interpreted as the degree to which individuals can maintain a socially acceptable standard of living, regardless of their performance in the labour market (Yu, Foster, et al., 2021). The discussion surrounding labour decommodification has raised concerns that individual's well-being may be jeopardized if they are compelled to sell their labour in the market, irrespective of working conditions or personal preferences (Hill & Irving, 2020).

Esping-Andersen's (1990) work has been critiqued by feminists for overlooking the challenges faced by women when dealing with family issues (Bambra, 2007). Feminist welfare studies have underscored that patriarchal family structures often leave women financially dependent on male family members, leading to the assumption of most of the caregiving responsibilities within the family (Lister, 1997; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1999). This unequal division of care between men and women is considered a social issue and is seen as a significant cause of time poverty among women (Warren, 2003). How people spend their time can be just as critical as how they spend their money, as it is linked to close personal and emotional interaction, which is essential for quality of life and human development (Folbre and Bittman (2004; Foster et al., 2022). Therefore, time poverty can have a negative impact on women's lives as much as financial poverty. Moreover, the unequal distribution of care between men and women in the family has been identified as a significant factor contributing to women's struggles to achieve gender equality in the labour market and other public domains (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). This perspective is supported by evidence. According to the 2021 Labour Force Survey for the EU 27, caregiving responsibilities are a critical obstacle to employment for women: 27.9% of women aged 25–49 who are not in the labour force said that caregiving was their primary reason for not seeking employment, compared to only 8% of men (European Commission, 2022a). Additionally, the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) estimates that caregiving responsibilities keep 7.7 million women in Europe out of the labour market and restrict many women to part-time work (EIGE, 2021a). In reality, 29% of women working part-time cite caregiving as the main reason, compared to only 6% of men (EIGE, 2021a). Furthermore, women are significantly underrepresented in decision-making roles across all sectors. For example, only one in four EU health ministers and four out of 10 junior ministers or vice-ministers were women (EIGE, 2021b). Similarly, the combined members of single or lower houses of national parliaments in EU member states comprise 66.8% men and 33.2% women (European Commission, 2022b).

To address the issue of the gendered division of care within families, it may not be sufficient to focus solely on promoting the decommodification of labour—providing opportunities for women to commodify their labour may also be necessary. Nyberg (2002) highlights that the independence of male workers from the labour market has been linked to their emancipation, while women's emancipation has been linked to their inclusion in paid work. Kroger (2011) suggests women may require government support to transition from their caregiving roles within the family to the labour force. Research has demonstrated that social democratic regimes, characterised by active government intervention in the labour market, have a higher percentage of economically active women

than other regimes (Gershury & Sullivan, 2003; Yu, Foster, et al., 2021).

To address critiques of Esping-Andersen's work (1990), scholars have turned their attention to the concept of defamilization (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Leitner, 2003; Lister, 1994; McLaughlin & Glendinning, 1994). While some scholars, like Leitner (2003) and Esping-Andersen (1999), focus on examining how welfare and market provisions can mitigate family responsibilities, others, such as Lister, are more concerned with achieving individuals' economic independence from the family. Lister's (1994, p. 7) understanding of the concept of defamilization can be seen in her discussion of the relationship between the concept of labour decommodification and defamilization:

The dimension of decommodification also needs to be complemented by that of what we might call 'defamilization', if it is to provide a rounded measure of economic independence. Welfare regimes might then also be characterised according to the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through the social security system.

Lister's insights into the concept of defamilization risk reveal two types of challenges faced by women in organizing their lives according to their preferences: the difficulty in securing resources to maintain a socially acceptable standard of living and the difficulty in gaining sufficient autonomy to choose how to participate in the family. Examining these challenges sheds light on the predicament faced by women who may become trapped in a 'Catch-22' situation (Yu et al., 2015). When women lack the financial means to maintain an acceptable standard of living, they may be forced to rely on male family members, thereby reducing their bargaining power over the allocation of caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, they may assume a majority of the caregiving responsibilities, leaving little time to pursue their careers and achieve financial independence within the family.

The discussion of this Catch-22 situation shows there are different types of defamilization risks caused by varying unfavourable conditions, such as a lack of job opportunities and financial resources to maintain a reasonable standard of living or to achieve financial independence from the family. Furthermore, these unfavourable conditions can be fluid rather than fixed. For instance, women may find themselves compelled to assume additional caregiving responsibilities as a result of certain formal care sectors experiencing service shortages, even if they do not desire such responsibilities. This phenomenon can be viewed as a form of 'reluctant refamilization'. Additionally, women may have less discretionary income to allocate, owing to rising living expenses.

Discretionary time

The concept of discretionary time developed by Goodin (2001) has been widely discussed (Claassen, 2012; Fitzpatrick, 2005). It refers to 'time beyond that necessary to attend to necessary functions' (Goodin et al., 2008, p. 5). Analysts have identified three functional necessities that constitute non-discretionary time—financial necessities met through paid labour; social necessities met through unpaid labour; and biological necessities met through personal care (Rice et al., 2006). Discretionary time is considered a

key element of autonomy (Goodin et al., 2005). Goodin (2001, p. 17) argues that 'even if we cannot precisely specify what is required for autonomy, we can specify certain things that preclude people from being self-legislating agents with the capacity to reflect upon their lives and shape them'. These things include an inadequate income and a lack of sufficient discretionary time (Goodin et al., 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2005). Time and financial resources are crucial for organizing daily activities and having adequate amounts of both provides individuals with more opportunities to structure their lives according to their preferences. Conversely, a lack of time or financial resources can make it difficult for individuals to organize their lives in this way.

The discussion of discretionary time provides insights into three conditions (related to time concepts) that affect people's chances of organizing their lives in their preferred way:

- The 'clock time condition', which relates to the availability of sufficient time to engage in preferred activities. As everyone has only 24 hours a day and 52 weeks a year (Goodin et al., 2004), individuals who spend all of their time fulfilling their financial, social and biological necessities will have no discretionary time to organize the life they prefer.
- The 'time schedule condition', which is concerned with whether people can choose when to use their time resources to achieve what they want. In discussing the concept of the social construction of time, analysts show that people's time in education can be constructed by some time schedules such as school terms, semesters and school years (Lingard & Thompson, 2017). These schedules are not totally under the control of individual participants in the provision and consumption of education. There are also concerns that people's quality of life will be undermined if their time is highly fragmented by different time schedules (Kwok, 2022; Rafnsdottir & Heijstra, 2013). People are likely to have more control over their lives if they can decide when to meet their necessities and when to spend their discretionary time.
- The 'role expectation condition', which concerns individuals' obligations to fulfil certain roles at specific times. For instance, individuals receiving unemployment benefits are expected to dedicate time to job searching, as mandated by the regulations for receiving financial assistance. Such role expectations can impact individuals' ability to allocate their time to other activities, including discretionary ones.

Analysing time-based conditions is crucial to understanding the defamilization risks faced by women. As previously mentioned, a common example of women facing defamilization risks is being forced to undertake the primary role of informal care providers within the family, leaving little opportunity for career development and financial independence. This example can be attributed to unfavourable time conditions in which women organize their lives. These conditions include:

- *Unfavourable clock time condition:* Women desire to participate in the workforce but lack sufficient time to do so.

- *Unfavourable time schedule:* This scenario can arise when the time allocated for women to provide care for their family conflicts with the time allocated for their paid job duties. For instance, some women may need to provide care during the daytime, which leaves them with discretionary time to use in the evening. Despite having free time in the evenings, they have no opportunity to take on a daytime job.
- *Unfavourable role expectation:* Women are expected to spend most of their time playing the role of a caregiver in the family, despite their desire to pursue other goals.

It is worth highlighting four points here. First, not all women face the same unfavourable time conditions in which they organize their lives. Therefore, they may encounter various forms of defamilization risks. Second, it is plausible that certain women may confront more than one unfavourable time condition, leading them to be vulnerable to multiple defamilization risks. Third, these unfavourable conditions can exhibit dynamism, with the potential to vary over time. Fourth, families can play a positive role in supporting women to tackle these risks. For instance, male family members can share caregiving responsibilities, thereby reducing the burden on women and allowing them more time to pursue their careers. However, family members themselves may also face unfavourable time conditions, which may limit their ability to help women manage defamilization risks.

Commodification of public goods

Public goods possess two main characteristics: they are non-rivalrous in consumption and non-excludable (Moon et al., 2017). It is important to note that the concept of public goods is ideal and few goods fully meet both of these criteria (Bodansky, 2012). Goods that partially meet one or both of these criteria are known as impure public goods (Kaul, 2019; Kaul et al., 1999). As some policy measures (such as those financially supporting people to provide informal care for their children and older people) can generate social benefits (such as nurturing social harmony and enriching human resources for society) which are not totally non-rivalrous or non-excludable, they can be regarded as impure public goods. In this discussion, we adopt the broader definition of 'public goods' used by Kaul et al. (1999) to refer to both pure and impure public goods. This is because impure goods are more prevalent than pure goods and the implications of publicness are still evident even when a good is only partly non-rival or partly excludable.

The literature on the commodification of public goods examines how the commodification of life in society is expanding (Trosow, 2014). Such an expansion can be seen as a part of the process in which the boundary between market and non-market-based interactions in society becomes increasingly blurred. It may also mean that the market becomes an increasingly important mechanism for producing and allocating wealth. To promote the commodification of public goods, different strategies can be used (Min, 2022; Shen & Shen, 2019). One such strategy is to transform public goods into market goods (Bond, 2003). An example is selling public rental flats. By doing so, the government turns the public rental flats from a public

good into a commodity, which is available for sale in the market. Another strategy is to use private means, instead of public measures, to secure public goods. For instance, subsidising private clinics to provide vaccinations to the public in order to promote public health.

The government's objective of promoting the commodification of public goods need not be at odds with women's efforts to address defamilization risks. On the contrary, policies aimed at commodifying public goods can improve women's chances of mitigating these risks. Take, for example, the government's vocational training programmes that have been outsourced to the private sector. By enabling women to acquire well-paying jobs through acquiring new skills, these programmes can provide them with the financial resources needed to access private care services, thereby reducing their caregiving responsibilities within the family. With increased control over their time, women can have more opportunities to organize their family life according to their preferences.

However, the government's pursuit of strategies to commodify public goods may create obstacles for women to address defamilization risks. For instance, the government's proposal to discontinue highly subsidised public nurseries in favour of private nurseries may have an adverse impact. Highly subsidised public nurseries have the potential to enhance women's time conditions by sharing care responsibilities within the family, enabling parents to save time and pursue paid work. By opening long hours, parents have greater control over when to delegate care duties to the nurseries and when to attend to their children personally. This control over the schedule facilitates formal employment participation. However, if the government replaces subsidised public nurseries with private ones, parents may face increased costs to access formal care services for their children. Those who are unable to afford privately-run nurseries without subsidies may find themselves dedicating more time to caring for their children. Consequently, they experience a form of reluctant refamilization, which can have implications for their career development.

The government's policies regarding the commodification of public goods can have a negative impact on the ability of

families to support women in addressing defamilization risks. For instance, if the government increases the rents of public housing to a significant extent, tenants may have to work longer hours to afford their rent. This leaves them less time to share caregiving responsibilities with the primary caregivers, often women. Consequently, this reduces the family's capacity to improve the time conditions for women to deal with defamilization risks.

The time-conditions framework

Building on the discussion of defamilization risks, discretionary time and commodification of public goods, the time-conditions framework is formed by four main elements (see Figure 1): the government policies on the commodification of public goods (Element 1), the time conditions in which women organize their lives (Element 2), the time conditions in which women's other family members organize their lives (Element 3) and the defamilization risks faced by women (Element 4). Element 1 refers to the government's efforts to either promote or reduce the commodification of public goods—these efforts include transforming public goods into private goods and using private means to secure public goods. Element 2 is made up of the three-time conditions (clock time, time schedule and role expectations) in which women organize their lives. Element 3 is also composed of the same three-time conditions but in the context of other family members. Finally, Element 4 is characterized by difficulties in maintaining a socially acceptable standard of living and a lack of opportunities to choose how to participate in the family.

Figure 1 demonstrates the time-conditions framework, which illustrates how government policies on the commodification of public goods can impact women's ability to reduce defamilization risks by affecting the time conditions in which they and their family members organize their lives. This framework is useful in addressing several critical issues. First, different government policies may create various unfavourable time conditions for women, leading to different types of defamilization risks. Second, the implementation of multiple policy measures

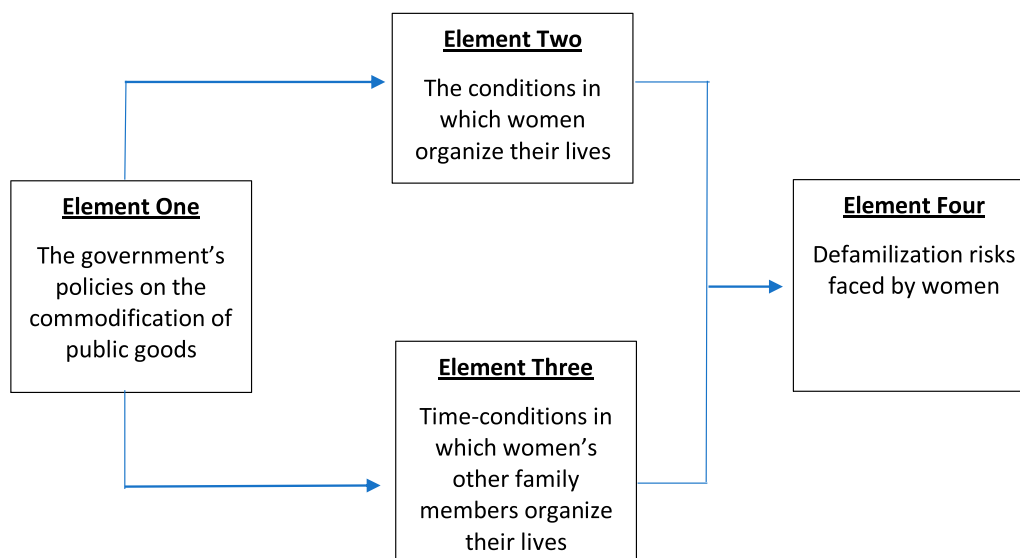


Figure 1. Time-conditions framework.

can leave women vulnerable to multiple defamilization risks simultaneously. Third, government policies can impact women's vulnerability to defamilization risks not only directly but also indirectly, by undermining the family's capacity to support women. Negative time conditions for women's family members brought by the government policies on the commodification of public goods may reduce their ability to assist women in managing defamilization risks. Fourth, the government can create favourable time conditions for women to manage defamilization risks through its policies on the commodification of public goods. These policies can reduce women's vulnerability to defamilization risks and provide them with more discretionary time. Thus, these policies can serve both as defamilization and discretionary time measures.

The example of Hong Kong

This section aims to demonstrate how the time-conditions framework can be practically applied. First, we will discuss important policies implemented by the Hong Kong government in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. These policies serve as examples of the government's attempts to promote the commodification of public goods. We will then examine how these policies create negative time conditions that affect women's chance of organizing their life according to their preferences. Finally, we will demonstrate how the discussion of these policies enhances our understanding of the four key issues highlighted by the time-conditions framework.

Public policies during the Covid 19 pandemic

Three policies are used for illustration: the mask-wearing policy, the home-working policy and the leave-home-safe policy. They were carried out almost at the same time during the pandemic. They shared the aim of promoting public health (a form of public goods) by preventing the spread of the virus. Instead of playing a central role in the provision, funding and regulation of supportive measures, the government appeared to use the opportunity to enhance commodity relationships.

The mask-wearing policy

In early 2020, Hong Kong was among the first to report Covid 19 cases to the WHO (HKSAR, 2020a). As the outbreak escalated, the government advised citizens to wear face masks to protect public health (CNN, 2020). Despite recognizing the importance of mask-wearing, the government was hesitant to ensure adequate mask availability for all citizens. Instead, it relied on the market to meet the demand, leading to a shortage of masks in the early stages of the pandemic, as people scrambled to acquire them. It refused suggestions to establish a central mechanism for producing and distributing masks (The Standard, 2021).

By mid-2020, the government made mask-wearing in public compulsory (Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, 2020) and provided free reusable masks to the public on certain occasions (HKSAR, 2020b). However, the quality of these masks was questionable, with most senior officials declining to wear them (CitizenNews,

2020; Zhang, 2020a). Instead, they continued to rely on the market for more trustworthy masks (HKFP, 2020). Despite this, the government made no effort to improve the quality of the free masks or make their distribution a regular policy. This highlights a trend of over-reliance on market mechanisms to meet public needs, which can be detrimental during crises.

Home-working policy

During the pandemic, the Hong Kong government implemented measures to minimize social contact, including reducing public transport and catering business operating hours and encouraging home-working. In 2020, special work arrangements were introduced for civil servants, requiring all civil servants (except those involved in emergency and essential public services) to work from home. The government also advised other employers to adopt similar policies (HKSAR, 2020c; 2020d). However, there was limited support from the government to ensure a suitable environment for employees to work from home. The employees were left to make arrangements with their families and/or employers to make home-working feasible.

Leave-home-safe policy

The leave-home-safe policy required individuals to use a mobile app to scan venue QR codes before entering government buildings (HKSAR, 2020d). Subsequently, this requirement was extended to other public places, including restaurants and cinemas. However, the government did not provide free smartphones for citizens to download and use the app. As a result, people were required to purchase a smartphone to comply with this policy.

Impacts on time conditions

Three policy measures have been discussed so far, all of which attempted to promote public goods through commodifying measures. The face mask policy relied on the supply of quality masks from the market to prevent the spread of the virus. The home-working policy encouraged civil servants and other employees to work from home so they had to adapt their home environment to enable home-working. Lastly, the leave-home-safe policy required people to have a smartphone. With little consideration of people's financial and personal capacities in meeting their needs through the market, these policies could generate negative effects on people and their families in many ways. One of these is creating unfavourable time conditions that affect women's chance of organizing life according to their preferences.

Unfavourable time schedule condition

The shift to a work-at-home model meant that women had to adjust their time schedule for different activities and some employers expected them to work beyond office hours. Hong Kong lacks regulations to protect home-work employees against such unreasonable demands. There is no statutory maximum number of working hours specified for different types of employees, nor is there an overtime maximum in Hong Kong. Moreover, with the average per

capita living space of Hong Kong dwellings being only 15 square meters, it is questionable whether homes provide a suitable setting for employment (Our Hong Kong Foundation, 2022). The government's introduction of Covid 19 pandemic policies seems to indicate a lack of sufficient concern for this issue. With more than one household member potentially working at home and limited living space in Hong Kong, individuals may compete for space to complete their job duties. This issue goes beyond a family matter, as it involves external interests such as the employers and business clients of family members. As women may need to juggle the requests of their employers, family members and other family members' employers, it can be challenging for them to have effective control over their work duties and discretionary time, thereby making it more difficult for women to organize their life according to their preferences.

Unfavourable role expectations

Women often face the expectation of providing care to children and elderly family members, which is reinforced by their physical presence at home even when they have formal job duties to fulfil (Liang, 2021; Kilkey & Merla, 2014). The Covid 19 pandemic and the government's policy response have exacerbated this situation. With the closure of schools and social service centres, children and elderly family members have had to stay at home for longer periods (The Straits Times, 2022). This resulted in some young children struggling with online classes and requiring more guidance with their homework (Lam et al., 2022), while elderly family members needed more assistance with tasks like scanning venue QR codes and booking vaccinations (Ma, 2022).

Unfavourable clock time condition

Although working from home may seem like an ideal solution for women to manage their dual roles as caregivers and employees, the reality may be quite different. Despite the potential time savings from switching to a work-at-home model, women may still struggle to balance their job duties with the increasing demands of their care receivers. The Covid 19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue. Statistics show that before the pandemic, women spent an average of 5.7 hours on domestic work and caregiving (Census and Statistics Department, 2015). However, during the pandemic, this number more than doubled to over 10 hours per day (Sun, 2020). This dramatic increase in caregiving responsibilities has left many women with even less clock time to organize their lives in a way that aligns with their personal preferences.

Our time-conditions framework draws attention to four crucial issues:

- Government policies regarding the commodification of public goods can create unfavourable time conditions for women to tackle defamilization risks.
- Simultaneous implementation of these policies can create multiple defamilization risks for women.
- These policies can undermine a family's capacity to help women tackle defamilization risks.

- A government has the ability to revise its policies on the commodification of public goods to create favourable time conditions for women to reduce defamilization risks.

The Hong Kong government's Covid 19 policies provide concrete examples of these four issues. First, the leave-home-safe policy required women to assist their older family members to meet the policy requirements, while the home-working policy meant that women had to adjust their time schedules. Second, simultaneously implementing these policy measures made some women vulnerable to multiple defamilization risks stemming from negative time conditions. Third, the Hong Kong government's policies on the commodification of public goods undermined some families' ability to assist women in reducing defamilization risks by reshaping time conditions. As discussed earlier, due to policies such as home-working arrangements and lockdown measures, family members may have to compete for resources, such as space and computers, to perform their jobs. Instead of supporting each other, women may have to compete with their family members for resources to handle the defamilization risks. Fourth, to reduce women's vulnerability to defamilization risks resulting from Covid 19 policies, the Hong Kong government could have taken a number of measures, such as subsidising the purchase of masks and smartphones, enforcing maximum working hour regulations for the work-at-home mode and providing formal care services to meet caregiving needs. Instead, it continued its firm belief in market capitalism and relied heavily on the market to meet people's needs or to ensure people meet the public policy requirements.

Conclusion

This article serves two primary objectives: introducing the time-conditions framework and examining specific Covid 19 pandemic policies implemented by the Hong Kong government through this framework. Additionally, it is important to discuss the beneficiaries and the costs associated with these policies. While the intention of these policies was to mitigate health risks and sustain service and labour markets, they emphasized the commodification of public goods, leading to clear winners. Notably, video-conferencing companies like Zoom emerged as beneficiaries. The Hong Kong government's encouragement of remote work, in line with global trends, led to a notable surge of over 40% in Zoom's service sales in 2020, as reported by BBC News in 2021 (BBC News, 2021). This development opens up avenues for private companies to generate profits and adds greater diversity to the work landscape within Hong Kong's economy. The smartphone industry was another sector that benefited from the commodification of public goods during the pandemic. The mandatory use of the leave-home-safe app forced many individuals to purchase smartphones solely to meet the government's requirement, even if they had no interest in using them for other purposes. This observation is supported by reports of a sharp increase in smartphone ownership among older people who had no previous inclination to use smartphones prior to the Covid 19 pandemic outbreak (Sun, 2022). Face mask were also winners in this process of commodification of public goods. In Chik's (2020) study, it was found that the government's

implementation of a mandatory mask-wearing policy in 2020, coupled with the public's strong inclination towards personal safety, led to a monthly demand for more than 40 million masks. This demand started to decline gradually only after the discontinuation of compulsory mask-wearing policies in early 2023.

However, there are also individuals who bear the costs in this commodification of public goods. As discussed earlier in this article, these individuals—predominantly women—had limited time to manage their lives due to increased caregiving responsibilities and heightened expectations within their family roles resulting from the home working policy and leave-home-save policy. These individuals are susceptible to reluctant defamilization, as they were compelled to take on additional family caregiving responsibilities, while experiencing a decrease in autonomy when deciding how to participate in their families. As a result, they faced defamilization risks. To safeguard the interests of these individuals, government policies regarding public goods during the Covid 19 pandemic should be evaluated with consideration for the defamilization risks faced by individuals—especially those being expected to provide care within their families.

Exploring the interconnection between defamilization, discretionary time and the commodification of public goods is a vast research area that merits further investigation. This article has used Hong Kong government's policy responses to the Covid 19 pandemic as an example to examine the applicability of the time-conditions framework. It is important to note that the Hong Kong government's approach to capitalism may differ from other capitalist governments, highlighting the necessity of scrutinizing whether the framework can be applied to analyse policies in various capitalist welfare regimes, including social democratic and conservative regimes.

There is still much to discover regarding the empirical value of the time-conditions framework. Examining how the framework can be utilized to study the regular and long-term policies conducted by governments may provide a more comprehensive understanding of its usefulness. By focusing on the Hong Kong government's response to the pandemic, we have highlighted that, even in the pursuit of safeguarding public health, governments may still prioritize the market's significance in shaping people's lives. However, investigating the framework's broader applicability will enable us to gain deeper insights into governments' policy decisions and their impact on the defamilization risks faced by different groups of people.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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