

Chapter 6 : Conclusion

- 6.1 The Hong Kong construction industry has a very poor safety record as compared with other industries in Hong Kong and in the region. The multi-layers subcontracting practice has been blamed as a serious problem that affecting the safety performance of the Hong Kong construction industry. However, the subcontracting practice has particular market values to survive. Restricting the multi-layers subcontracting practice in order to improve the safety performance should be carefully considered in balancing its advantages and disadvantages.
- 6.2 A questionnaire survey was conducted to review the current subcontracting status in the construction market, determine the correlation between the multi-layers subcontracting practice and the accident rate, and explore the perception of the construction industry towards the multi-layers subcontracting practice. The survey indicated that excessive subcontracting in the construction industry has existed and the principal contractors have not exercised tight control over the subcontractors. The survey also suggested that the multi-layers subcontracting practice was one of the major factors that affecting the safety performance. (NB. Other factors were not indicated) However, restricting the multi-layers subcontracting practice might bring with great impacts which could not be afforded and accepted by majority of the contractors in Hong Kong. Full support for restricting the multi-layers subcontracting practice has not been achieved.
- 6.3 Face to face interviews were carried out which invited the independent professional construction practitioners to discuss and provide recommendations based on the questionnaire survey results. They have provided value and professional opinions for reference on why the multi-layers subcontracting causes problems? Why the quality and performance of subcontractors are difficult to control? Why restricting

the multi-layers subcontracting was considered impracticable? What are the expected impacts? How the free market principle be damaged? Are there any other effective ways to improve the safety performance? All these were addressed and analyzed in chapter 5 in detail. According to the discussion section, alternative measures were identified and categorized in three concerned areas, which were - strengthen the control of subcontractors, legislation and enforcement and technological changes.

- 6.4 Although it was considered that reducing the degree of subcontracting might help improving the safety performance, it might not be the best and only method to solve the problem. If it was not associated with other appropriate accident prevention measures, the safety performance would not be improved indeed but only the feature of the accident record was changed, meaning that the employer of the accident victims became the principal contractor instead of the subcontractor.

The research concluded that restricting the multi-layers subcontracting practice in order to improve the construction safety performance would not welcomed by the industry at large. Without their full support and cooperation, implementation of this would encounter tremendous pushing back that made the regulation and application not practical. Meanwhile, subcontracting practice has its values and advantages for the construction market and the Hong Kong economy, which should not be underestimated. However, Linehan (2000b) further commented that certain subcontracting by professional trades was unavoidable though excessive subcontracting should be minimized. In conclusion the proposed alternative measures, mentioned in chapter 5 for improving the safety performance of the Hong Kong construction industry as well as reduction of excessive subcontracting, are recommended for strategic formulation and corrective actions planning.

6.5 The results of this research should be seen as preliminary because of the limitations of data, time and budget for the study. However, this study shall be used as an overview of the existing status of multi-layers subcontracting practice, the perception of the Hong Kong construction industry towards the multi-layers subcontracting and the alternative accident prevention measures for improving the safety performance of the Hong Kong construction industry.

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