

內地新到港青少年的適應

The Population Poster:
How do Young New Arrivals from Mainland China Adapt

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SUMMARY REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

This exploratory study looks at how recent young arrivals from Mainland China adapt to Hong Kong. Those under study are aged between 10 and 18 and have been in Hong Kong for less than 2 years. It also interviews parents to see how well they think their children have adapted. While some of the respondents had already adapted well to Hong Kong, others still have many difficulties to overcome.

The major objectives of this study are to understand what the difficulties of adaptation are for recent young arrivals, the causes of these difficulties, and hence to explore the implications in terms of services and policy options.

2. METHODOLOGY

A case-study approach was adopted so that the researchers had an in-depth interview with each respondent. With their consent, 51 recent arrivals and 21 parents were interviewed. Letters of invitation for interview were sent to a sampling of 720 relevant families drawn at random from the service record of the International Social Service, Hong Kong Branch. Stratified sampling was also employed for different districts where there was a significant population of recent arrivals from China. Some respondents were referred by other social services agencies as well as service units of the Federation. Eight interviewers, all professional social workers, interviewed the youths and parents in face-to-face interviews lasting from an hour to an hour-and-a-half using uniform sets of open-ended questionnaires. Respondents were encouraged to express their opinions and feelings freely.

Obviously, the small number of cases in this study are not necessarily representative of the overall population of recent young arrivals in Hong Kong, nevertheless a qualitative analysis of the major difficulties that they face can shed light on the issue in a way that can never solely be done on a quantitative basis. Since the respondents showed no hesitation in answering the questions, we are confident that the replies are honest and reliable.

3. RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

- 3.1 Of the 51 young respondents, there were 24 males and 27 females.
- 3.2 Twenty had been living in Hong Kong for under 6 months; ten from 6 months to a year; thirteen from a year to 18 months; eight from 18 months to two years.
- 3.3 Twenty-seven came from Guangdong province, and 24 from other provinces.

- 3.4 Most families (43) have both parents residing in Hong Kong.
- 3.5 Over half of the parents had primary or secondary education. Ten parents had no education. Four parents had post-secondary education.
- 3.6 Twenty-eight recent young arrivals had both parents working and 21 had either parent working.
- 3.7 Nineteen youths were living in private housing, fifteen in public housing, ten in a squatter area or temporary housing area, six in a relative's house and one in a quarter.
- 3.8 Thirty-seven youths attend school, while eleven have been admitted for next semester. Two are not studying and one is working.
- 3.9 Twenty-eight are in primary schools and seventeen in secondary schools or schools run by the Vocational Training Council.
- 3.10 From the above information we can conclude that most of the recent arrivals belong to working class families.

4. FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEM

- 4.1 Recent young arrivals usually reported that they had had mixed feelings on learning that they would soon be leaving the environment where they were being brought up. In spite of having a generally positive impression of Hong Kong, most respondents also had feelings of uncertainty, anxiety or sadness about separating from friends and relatives in China.
- 4.2 The majority of the parents had high expectations regarding the education of their children. Yet not many of them were sensitive to their emotional needs.
- 4.3 Since most families were working class, financial constraints meant that their parents had to work long hours. While the majority of the parents did provide their children with the basic necessities of shelter, food and clothing, they were unable to help them adapt to their new environment.
- 4.4 In spite of recognizing that their parents helped them and cared for them, the children were reluctant to turn to their parents when they felt frustrated or anxious.
- 4.5 Most of the respondents did not have a close relationship with their Hong Kong relatives. Instead, they kept up close ties with family members in China. This indicates that relatives in Hong Kong do not function as a support system for these young people.
- 4.6 On the whole, since most of the parents were unable to be supportive to their children, the family did not provide a support system for them either.

5. ADAPTING TO SCHOOL

- 5.1 Going to school has a special meaning for the young arrivals as it signifies their formal integration into Hong Kong society.
- 5.2 The majority of the respondents had found it very difficult to find a school. A large number of new arrivals were unaware of educational resources and where to get information. The lack of standard procedure in enrolment for different schools and the arbitrary admission criteria confused both parents and children. Many respondents were rejected by schools on the grounds that they were nearly fifteen, because they did not have an official or updated academic report, because their English was inadequate and for many other reasons. In short, the process of finding a school was a very dehumanizing and intimidating experience both for parents and children.
- 5.3 In order to be admitted, most respondents were put in the lower grades as the trade-off, mostly one or two years lower than they had been in their home town. One respondent was placed four grades lower than he had been previously. Of the twenty respondents who had been attending secondary school in China, only twelve were admitted to secondary schools in Hong Kong. The social and human costs of this misplacement is huge.
- 5.4 Nevertheless most of the respondents had a positive attitude and treasured the opportunity of emigration. They were eager to be integrated into the new society and were prepared to try very hard to achieve it.
- 5.5 English was the most difficult subject for all respondents. However, most respondents were concerned about their academic performance. They were aware that good academic results would be of tremendous importance for a successful future.
- 5.6 Almost all respondents believed that initiative and the ability to communicate were positive factors in building friendships. Age differences were perceived as a barrier to friendship. However, it was commonly the case that most respondents received support from friends or classmates from a similar background.
- 5.7 Care and concern from teachers played a part in helping the recent arrivals to adapt. Acceptance, recognition and encouragement from teachers were helpful for most of the respondents.
- 5.8 In conclusion, going to school was the crucial step in the adaptation of the arrivals. Despite the difficulties, most of the respondents greatly appreciated going to school.

6. PEER SUPPORT SYSTEM

- 6.1 Most of the respondents indicated that support from their peers was important to them, particularly when they felt stress, anxiety or frustration.
- 6.2 While many respondents claimed that their family members were the most significant people in their adaptation, they also indicated that their own efforts were important as well.

- 6.3 Respondents said friendship was important. They were keen to spend time with friends who were visiting from Mainland China. This could reflect the respondents' belief that peer support was essential for their adaptation.
- 6.4 In the end, all the respondents expressed the wish to stay in Hong Kong for good. They also expressed hope and confidence in the future.

7. COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND NETWORK

- 7.1 Most respondents were passive and reluctant to use existing social services. This might be due to the highly protective attitudes of their parents. It is generally the case that recent arrivals trust only government offices or schools. Proactive intervention by community organizations and social service agencies would make their services more accessible to these recent arrivals.
- 7.2 Most respondents said they hoped to integrate fully into Hong Kong society and be a good citizen. They were very strongly motivated to make a success of their lives in Hong Kong.
- 7.3 In general, most respondents said that they had encountered very little discrimination against them. Many were impressed that people in Hong Kong were helpful and enthusiastic. Some, however, felt bitter about being labelled or stereotyped.
- 7.4 In terms of services, the majority of the respondents rated English courses, centrally co-ordinated school placement and adaptation classes to be the top three items.

8. EVALUATION OF LIFE IN HONG KONG

- 8.1 Almost all respondents reported that the most difficult time was the period before they had been admitted to a school. Once admitted, they found respect and dignity from going to school.
- 8.2 Some respondents were happy to be re-united with the family, although some were disappointed by the inadequate living space. A number found the language barrier frustrating, whereas the majority were proud of their good school results.
- 8.3 English was, on the whole, the greatest source of stress for most respondents.
- 8.4 The majority of respondents soon developed a sense of belonging to Hong Kong and planned to pursue a career through better education in their new society.

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 The Characteristics of Recent Arrivals from Mainland China

9.1.1 The similar socio-historical background of recent arrivals:

While new immigrants face common problems in their new country such as learning a language, finding a job, coping with stress, building new interpersonal relationships, getting education for the children, those who come from Mainland China seem to follow a different path. Since Hong Kong society and Chinese society have a common origin and history, many of them speak the same language or different dialects of the same language. Likewise they share similar traditional value systems and child-rearing practices. The very fact that a great proportion of the older generation of Hong Kong residents were themselves immigrants from Mainland China at various periods shows the uniqueness of this migration process.

9.1.2 Hong Kong society is receptive to arrivals from Mainland China

The change of sovereignty after 1997 brings Hong Kong and Mainland China closer together. There is social research which shows that people of Hong Kong do not discriminate against new arrivals from China, though stereotyping and prejudiced attitudes are not uncommon in certain circumstances. It seems that, in general, local sentiment has been receptive rather than exclusive. The historical background of Hong Kong people makes them sympathetic towards arrivals from Mainland China and thus favours their adaptation.

9.1.3 The use of the English language in Hong Kong establishes a strong barrier to adaptation for the newcomers from Mainland China

The young newcomers from Mainland China have to face numerous challenges including, especially for those from the north, the need to use Cantonese in daily life and English at school. At the same time, the strong emphasis on English in the school system puts much pressure on the young. Their parents believe widely that their children's education is the sole means of improving the family's financial situation in the future and of climbing the social ladder. This high expectation on the part of the parents, together with the fact that English will retain its predominant importance in the future, are precisely why English is the first barrier a new arrival to Hong Kong has to overcome.

9.2 Added Difficulties for Personality Development as a Result of Emigration

Emigrating to a new place is especially difficult for the very young. It involves the separation from home and familiar places, from friends, a change of roles and sometimes of language. All these together with the need to adjust to a whole host of

new situations and settings, create much anxiety, confusion and fear for the young. This enormous change in environment and human relationship will certainly have a great impact on the personality development of a young person. Erik Erikson, the developmental psychologist, has shown that children of this age are at the stage characterized by self-identity during which they need to develop their self image and self concept through identifying with their significant others. Youths who are at the stage characterized by autonomy will be eager to shape their character through germinating their own value system and social circles. The emigration process and the extensive adaptation it brings with it create added difficulties for the young in terms of character building and personality development.

9.3 Adjustment Problems for Young Newcomers from Mainland China

9.3.1 Communication Barrier and Inadequate Standard of English

There are three areas of change regarding language : (a) the change of written Chinese from simplified characters to complex ones; (b) the need to speak Cantonese; and (c) the need to learn English.

The findings of this research indicate that the change from simplified characters to complex ones does not pose much difficulties. Since the written language is the same young people adapt quickly once they are familiar with the rules of conversion.

The need to speak Cantonese in Hong Kong does create some communication problems. As a result, this hinders the newcomers from making new friends and creating a social circle. It also affects their understanding at school. However, respondents indicate that they learn Cantonese very quickly once they get into a school.

Their greatest difficulty is that their English is inadequate to cope with school requirements. They need to use English in almost every aspect of school, such as listening in class, doing homework, reading text books, writing examinations or communicating at school. The lack of special support and of the opportunity to practice in school very much affect the pace of their improvement in English.

9.3.2 Schooling Problems: Unable to Enrol Quickly or Forced to Down-grade

It is indicated both by previous research and this research that predominant problems in school are: (a) being unable to enrol quickly; and (b) being forced to down-grade.

The first is a common phenomenon. While the Education Department assists by disseminating pamphlets with lists of schools and by setting up a District Education Liaison Office, the responsibility for finding a school place for their children rests solely with the parents. Decisions on admissions are also in the hands of the principals of the individual schools. It is noted that some of the respondents have experienced no problems in finding a school place when the staff of the Education Department they approached have intervened actively. However, the support from the Education Department for the new arrivals, whose numbers are due to continue to increase in the next few years, is far from satisfactory. As a result, many parents have

difficulties in finding a school which will accept a newcomer with inadequate English.

Many newcomers are also forced to down-grade. In order to be admitted to a school, these new students are obliged to agree to enter a lower grade, with an average down-grading of one to two academic years. One respondent of this research was down-graded four academic years. This phenomenon may be due to:

- (a) *English language ability much emphasized in the assessment for admission;*
- (b) *The inadequate support and lack of special arrangements from the Education Department for these newcomers puts them in a disadvantageous position as regards enrolment. The inflexibility of current placement mechanisms also aggravates the situation. In order to match the entry points for student placement, it is common for a newcomer of Secondary 2 standard to be placed in Primary 6 so that he/she can fit in the Secondary One Placement Mechanism of the Education Department. The student, therefore, has to waste two more years at school.*

The social and human costs of this misplacement of students in the school system are enormously high. In terms of social cost, the waste of educational and financial resources is vast. According to the Hong Kong Annual Report, the average cost on education for a student in Hong Kong is approximately \$13,970 per year. If they are on average down-graded for one to two academic years, the waste of educational resources will be huge. A possible option for the better use of this financial resource is to provide for these new young arrivals an Intensive English Enhancement Programme, the objective of which is to improve the English standard of these students so that they can fit in the formal educational system. The emphasis of the Programme therefore would be on the use of English in the school system, such as grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, reading or listening. Duration of the Programme may last from three months to a year, depending on the assessed English language ability of the participants. The financial input in organizing this Intensive English Enhancement Programme is obviously more cost-effective than to keep misplacing newcomers in the school system.

On the individual level, spending a couple of unnecessary years at school will certainly provoke feelings of disappointment and frustration.

9.4 Factors Hindering the Development of Interpersonal Relationships

The newly-arrived students are usually older than their classmates. Coupled with their inability to communicate in Cantonese, it takes them a long time to develop friendships. While good academic results at school may be a positive factor in gaining respect from classmates, it may also attract jealousy and prejudice. These factors hinder the development of interpersonal relationships for the newcomers.

9.5 Inadequate Support from Families and Peers

The newcomers generally belong to working class families where both parents usually work long hours to earn an adequate income. Despite the basic needs of children such as food, clothing and housing, being taken care of, parents are unable to provide emotional support for their growing sons or daughters. This may be because the parents have themselves not settled yet. Support from peers also seems to be weak.

9.6 Unfamiliarity with the Social Services and Community Resources

Parents of new arrivals tend to protect their children highly and hesitate to allow their children to join programmes and activities organized by social welfare organizations. This protective attitude prevents the youths from developing their own social circle and getting to know new friends. These young people seldom use services from various social welfare agencies. How to link up existing services with these young people and make them more accessible is a major concern.

9.7 Difficulties in Finding Employment for the Older Youths

Those over 15 are not eligible for free education. At present, courses offered by the Vocational Training Council are mostly for occupations dominated by males, for example, wood work or construction work, car repairs or plumbing. Furthermore, choices of courses with entry qualification at Form 3 are quite limited. This brings particular hardship for newly arrived girls aged over 15. Without appropriate and adequate vocational training, these young female newcomers seem to have no way of finding employment.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Keeping track of the increasing trend of young newcomers from Mainland China and strengthening support services for adaptation.

Current research shows that new arrivals will receive information pamphlets from the government or welfare agencies. Yet the follow-up and supportive work on adaptation or referral for schooling from government departments are far from satisfactory. Despite welfare organizations currently providing various services on adaptation for new arrivals, they are far from adequate because of limited resources.

As stated, young newcomers usually take a long time or face many difficulties before they can be admitted into the school system. Compared with their counterparts in Hong Kong where school-age children can gain access to educational facilities, these young arrivals suffer considerably as a result of the lack of a proactive placement system for them.

The Federation recommends that the government should keep track of the trend of increasing numbers of young arrivals. Support services for adaptation beyond the point of first contact with welfare agencies should be strengthened. Referral and follow-up services on schooling and the monitoring on overall admission should be emphasized.

10.2 Providing Courses on Intensive English Enhancement and Life Adaptation

In order to improve the English standard, Intensive English Enhancement courses should be provided. This could assist the students to fit more easily into the school system. The Life Adaptation part of the courses may include talks on adaptation and visits to organizations relevant to their daily lives. The duration of the course may last from three months to a year, depending on the progress of the students. Course contents could be standardized. These courses may be carried out by the Education Department, schools in different districts or Non-Governmental Organizations.

In view of the common phenomenon that many newcomers are forced to down-grade so that huge educational and financial resources will be wasted, the Education Department should consider setting up a Comprehensive Academic Assessment so as to give an objective assessment for school admission. The current situation that the standard of English is over-emphasized in the admission process should also be reviewed. While not affecting the autonomy of schools in admission, the result of this Comprehensive Academic Assessment can be recommended to schools for their consideration in admitting the new arrivals from the Mainland.

10.3 Providing more Choices of Courses from Vocational Training Council

A large number of existing courses provided by the Vocational Training Council do not cater to the needs of the arrivals aged from 15 to 18 who are no longer eligible for free education in Hong Kong. More choices of vocational training courses should be provided for newcomers, particularly for girls, by the Vocational Training Council.

10.4 Strengthening the Linkage and Co-operation among Youth Organizations and Schools

As already mentioned, young new arrivals seldom use existing services provided by youth and community organizations. Youth organizations should take more initiative to approach schools which can refer appropriate students for service programmes. Better and closer co-operation among service organizations and schools will be more cost-effective in terms of utilization of resources.