

香港青年北上發展趨勢的研究

**A Study on the Trends of Hong Kong Young People
Seeking a Career on the Mainland**

青少年問題研究系列(二十四)

Youth Study Series No. 24

香港青年協會

The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups

3.2001

**The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups
Youth Study Series No.24**

**A Study on the Trends of Hong Kong Young People
Seeking a Career on the Mainland**

SUMMARY REPORT

1. Introduction

According to various surveys conducted by the Census and Statistics Department over the past decade, the number of Hong Kong residents working on the Mainland has been on the increase. The figures show a two-fold rise, from 52,000 people in 1988 to around 157,000 in 1998.

It is anticipated that as China gains access into the World Trade Organization (WTO), the opportunity for economic development will significantly increase. Whether Hong Kong young people can make good use of this opportunity and seek a career on the Mainland, has raised widespread concern. This study focuses on the views of young people on this issue and concentrates on three particular areas:

- The impact of China's entry into the WTO on employment opportunities for Hong Kong young people;
- The situation of Hong Kong young people working on the Mainland and the problems they encountered;
- Youth's attitude towards working on the Mainland.

This study has been conducted through:

- Interviews with scholars and experts concerned;
- Opinion surveys of young people in Hong Kong;
- In-depth interviews with youth who have work experience on the Mainland.

It is hoped that this study will provide recommendations on training strategies and policies on the issue of young people in search of employment on the Mainland.

A total of 20 scholars and experts were interviewed between February and March 2001. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 youth, 13 males and 7 females aged between 23 and 38, who have worked on the Mainland. "Young people who have worked on the Mainland" is defined as youth who have worked on the Mainland during the past three years. However, people who traveled to the Mainland to conduct business negotiation, inspection of business and to attend trade fairs, meetings or business-related entertainment were excluded from the survey. Transport workers commuting between Hong Kong and the mainland, fishermen and seamen working within the waters of the mainland were excluded as well.

An opinion poll was conducted from 27 February to 6 March 2001, by random sampling. A total of 1,023 young people aged from 18 to 39 were successfully interviewed by phone. The success rate was 48.5%.

2. Discussion

- 1. Despite of the fact that over the past decade the number of young people aged between 15 and 39 working on the Mainland has been increasing, the percentage continues to decrease. People working on the Mainland are mainly the employees of companies in Hong Kong. The number of young people with a higher level of education, or a professional qualification, working on the Mainland is on the rise.**

Although the number of youth aged between 15 and 39 working on the Mainland has increased over the past decade from 34,000 to around 80,000, the percentage of this age group in relation to the total number of Hong Kong citizens working on the Mainland, has decreased from 64.9% in 1988 to 50.6% in 1998. The decrease is more prevalent in the 20-29 year old age contingent.

During 1988-1998, 70% of those working on the Mainland were employees. Within this group, an overwhelming majority of 90% has been on the pay rolls of Hong Kong based companies. Only 20% were employers. This suggests that the opportunities to work on the Mainland are largely dependent on whether companies based in Hong Kong have offered them a job on the Mainland.

The percentage of people with a higher level of education working on the Mainland has increased from 27% in 1995 to 33% in 1998. The

percentage of managers and executives working on the Mainland between 1992 and 1998 has been maintaining at the level of 40%. The percentage of professionals and associate professionals working on the Mainland shows a remarkable increase from 22.6% in 1992 to 35% in 1998. This reveals that, for appointments on the Mainland, Hong Kong companies prefer capable and trustworthy employees, who have obtained a higher level of education and professional qualification.

2. **It is believed that China's entry into the WTO will especially benefit people with a higher level of education. Youth who possess good knowledge both in international practices as well as in customs and culture on the Mainland, have special skills and are willing to be relocated to remote areas, have fair chances of being employed on the Mainland.**

Views on the employment opportunity of young people after China's entry into WTO are varied, but the educational attainment is the main consideration. It is expected that people with a higher level of education will benefit more.

"The Manpower Projection to 2005" has indicated the existence of a discrepancy between the demand and supply of manpower as a result of Hong Kong's economic restructuring and China's entry into the WTO. There will be a surplus of manpower with low education level and low skill level, estimated at 144,100, and a shortage in manpower with matriculation, post secondary, graduated and above level, estimated at 116,900. The report revealed that the manpower demand for professionals, managers and executives will be undersupplied and the need is projected to grow from 3.0% in 1999 to 6.7% in 2005.

As indicated by the report of the Commerce and Industry Bureau, after China's accession to the WTO, industries such as banking and finance, insurance, retail services, telecommunication and tourism will benefit more. According to the report "China's Entry into the WTO and the Impact on Hong Kong Business" published by the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, service sectors such as sourcing, merchandising, logistic and import and export will equally benefit. Moreover, the market will open to foreign professionals in the fields of jurisprudence, accountancy, management consultancy, architecture, engineering and planning, as a result of market access liberalization.

As concluded by scholars and experts in the interviews organized for this study, three main considerations have been identified as facilitating the employment of youth with secondary level of education:

1) Knowledge in international practices. In view of her entry into the WTO, China will further open her economy and market. More overseas companies will be established in China, and market practice on the Mainland will be gradually adjusted to international standards. Hong Kong young people with experience in dealing with foreigners, possessing adequate language skills and modern ideas can help the Chinese businesses to get in line with international standards, by obtaining employment in management and consultancy positions.

2) Knowledge about China. Some scholars opined that the Hong Kong youth might not possess a thorough understanding of our country but rather a vague notion. In order to facilitate their employment on the Mainland, Hong Kong young people should improve their knowledge about the administrative structures, culture, environment, geography and specific traditions of China.

3) Possession of special skills and willingness to relocate to remote areas. China's entry into the WTO will open more opportunities to professionals, but nevertheless youth with special skills and willing to relocate to remote areas would also have fair chances to work on the Mainland. Working in the Western Mainland would be a special opportunity to consider.

3. As a result of China's entry into the WTO and the globalization of world economy, the mobility of manpower resources becomes the main trend in the labor market. Youth should build up their international awareness and be prepared to work outside Hong Kong. There is a need to better equip themselves and to become multi-talent mobile workers so as to adapt to the changing work environment.

Companies are always looking for higher efficiency, lower cost and development of new markets. Globalization of world economy presents the companies with a worldwide reach in manufacturing components, restructuring production procedures and enhancement of quality.

Scholars indicate that companies will be interested in employing multi-talent mobile workers, which means that young people should be able to accept more change in the nature of the job and in job mobility, as well as acquire knowledge on how to master new technology and information. They should be willing to develop base in different places and build up networks. The globalization of the economy leads to great mobility of manpower resources.

4. Most respondents from the youth poll survey believe that following China's entry into the WTO, working on the Mainland will be the main trend in Hong Kong's labor market. Forty-six percent of the respondents hold a positive attitude to working on the Mainland.

80% of respondents believe that as a result of China's entry into the WTO, working on the Mainland will constitute the main trend in manpower movement. 46% of respondents hold a positive attitude towards working on the Mainland, 24% were indifferent, 17% said they would avoid as far as possible and 10% rejected.

Cross tabulations show that respondents with family members working on the Mainland, supported by family members, unmarried or males, are more likely to accept to work on the Mainland. The education level and the age have no significant relationship with respondents' attitudes towards working on the Mainland.

Of the 922 respondents who are willing to work on the Mainland, 46% of them think that there is opportunity available on the Mainland, 13% think that the pay would be more attractive on the Mainland, and another 12% think this will be the main trend in Hong Kong.

61% of the respondents choose Hong Kong as the base for development, 5% choose Mainland China, and 23% would go to any place where opportunity presents itself.

5. Most respondents expect too high a pay and benefits when considering working on the Mainland, and have little knowledge about the keen competition in the labor market.

75% to 83% of respondents indicated that factors like medical insurance, housing or extra allowances, transportation subsidies, training and location, were their main concerns when considering working on the Mainland.

Scholars pointed out that particular industries would not offer a better employment package such as medical insurance, housing or extra allowances and transportation subsidies to Hong Kong employees who work on the Mainland. Since China's open door policy has trained up a lot of talents, people with appropriate qualifications and relevant experience in different industries are available on the Mainland. Note should be made that working conditions on the Mainland may not be better than in Hong Kong, or employees may even be placed in the western or northern parts of the Mainland. Youth should be prepared to adapt to the new, changing environment.

Most respondents expect too high a pay and benefits when considering work in the Mainland. They are not aware that employment on the Mainland

will no longer mean higher pay and benefits. Sometimes, asking for too much could actually lead to losing the opportunity.

6. Most respondents think that youth in Hong Kong have better working ability and working attitude than young people on the Mainland. However, youth with work experience on the Mainland give lower rating to youth in Hong Kong.

Regarding work ability, most respondents think that youth in Hong Kong are more capable of using English, mastering advanced technology, innovation, communication and decision-making. However, respondents with work experience on the Mainland think that Hong Kong youth rate themselves too high in comparison with youth on the Mainland.

According to the telephone poll, youth who do not work on the Mainland claimed that youth from Hong Kong have more strength than youth from the Mainland. Among the ten merits of work abilities listed in the questionnaire, youth in Hong Kong consider they have a higher rating in seven of them. Over 70% of respondents think that youth in Hong Kong are more capable of communication, adaptation, using English and have better international perspective; over 60% of respondents think that Hong Kong youth are more innovative, make better decisions and are better in mastering advanced technology. They think that the only merits of youth on the Mainland are their proficiency in Putonghua, writing skill in Chinese and stronger ability in self-learning.

It should be noted that respondents with work experience on the Mainland give a higher rating to youth on the Mainland in areas as the use of English, mastering advanced technology, innovative ability, communication skill and decision-making capacity. Their comments are based on their personal experience while working on the Mainland. It is worth paying attention to these perceptions.

Regarding work attitude, most respondents agree that youth in Hong Kong are honest, responsible and better motivated. However, more than half of the respondents believe that youth on the Mainland have longer endurance.

Most respondents think that youth in Hong Kong have a better work attitude. 64% of the respondents think that Hong Kong youth are more honest, 48% think that Hong Kong youth are more responsible and better motivated than youth on the Mainland. However, 56% opined that Mainland youth are better prepared to deal with hardships at work.

It is important to note that most scholars affirmed that merits claimed by Hong Kong youth are actually diminishing. The work attitude of Hong Kong youth should be improved. They are less enduring, too ego-centered and less considerate towards their employers. The scholars warned that youth should be aware of their shortfalls and must change or improve in order to avoid being defeated by competition.

There is no clear objective standard to judge who has more advantages in competition. However, the difference between the opinion of the respondents and scholars should be pondered. If most of the employers in Hong Kong share similar ideas with the scholars, the chance of Hong Kong youth working on the Mainland would be greatly reduced.

7. Most respondents do not prepare well for finding employment on the Mainland. Results from the case interviews show that youth with work experience on the Mainland have a higher sense of the competition and, as a result, they are more driven towards education and self-improvement.

70% of respondents indicate that they would learn Putonghua to prepare for working on the Mainland, but only 23% of them do carry out their plan. Even though 70% to 80% of respondents have planned to take measures to prepare themselves for working on the Mainland, such as collecting data, visiting the Mainland, consulting relevant people, taking appropriate courses and participating in exchange programs, less than 10% have really taken actions.

Most respondents over assess the capability of youth in Hong Kong and do not actively prepare for working on the Mainland. They would easily lose the chance of employment on the Mainland if they do not prepare well. It is important to encourage youth to enhance their competitive advantage in order to grasp the opportunities generated by the integration of China in the WTO.

Results of the case interviews show that youth with work experience on the Mainland possess better knowledge about the merits of the youth on the Mainland and have a higher sense of the competition. Irrespective of their willingness to work on the Mainland, they appreciate the merits of their counterparts, considering them motivated to learn, hard working and capable of fast improvement. They even change their career plan or study plan in order to better compete with the youth on the Mainland.

On one hand, respondents with no working experience on the Mainland give a high rating to the merits of youth in Hong Kong, and they do not prepare themselves for working on the Mainland. On the other hand, those respondents with work experience on the Mainland know more about their counterparts and in turn push themselves for further studies. This implies that direct contact with youth on Mainland is a driving force to increase their competitiveness.

Many local institutes and colleges have organized internship programs aiming at sending young people to the Mainland for exposure and exchange. The Trade Development Council is planning a “Summer Internship Program for University Students”, encouraging students to sign up in internships during the summer offered within trading companies, or sending them to the Mainland for job placement. Moreover, many colleges have participated in internship programs with AIESEC.

Similar internship programs are currently operating in the UK and USA. For example, the concept of Gap Year encourages students to defer studies for one year before entering universities, so as to gain work experience in order to be more mature and make better decisions concerning their own development path or future qualification. In addition, community colleges, business sectors and community youth counseling institutes, collaborate closely to design courses with direct relation to the business world. These are valuable models that can be used as reference by the authorities and institutions concerned.

Recommendations

- 1. China's entry into the WTO will certainly provide employment opportunities for Hong Kong young people. The government should collect data and oversee the developments in this field, in order to establish long-term human resource and training strategies.**
- 2. Young people should be provided with more opportunities in order to improve their understanding of the cultural heritage of our country, its social and geographic layout, as well as its economic development. Exchange and exposure programs with the Mainland should be introduced to primary and secondary levels of education, so that youngsters could develop an adequate knowledge of our country from early stages of education. Later on, this would undoubtedly facilitate a better career planning by taking into account all work opportunities at hand, both in HKSAR and Mainland China.**
- 3. Experience gained from student placement and internship programs is especially valuable for youth willing to work on the Mainland. Universities and business sectors should continue to provide more training opportunities for the youth.**
- 4. The authorities and voluntary organizations concerned, should consider setting up a Resource Center providing young people who are seeking employment on the Mainland with information about trends and participation channels within Mainland's market.**
- 5. As a result of the globalization of world economy, the mobility of manpower resources becomes the main trend. Creating international awareness among youth and enabling them to become multi-talent mobile workers is a matter of concern. The emphasis on improving competitiveness, work ability and work attitude should be placed in different education levels. Both education and youth should work together in these areas.**