

IMMIGRATION AND HONG KONG: “NEW IMMIGRANTS” AND ETHNIC MINORITIES¹

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Background

Geography. Hong Kong is located on the south eastern tip of the Mainland of China. It is made up of three distinct areas: the New Territories, Kowloon and Hong Kong Island as well several hundred small islands in the surrounding waters. It has a total area of 1,095 sq. km (423 sq. miles).

In 2011 the population was 7,071,576. 60.5% of the population were born in Hong Kong, 32.1% were born in Mainland China or Macao and 7.4% were born elsewhere. 93.2% of the population are Chinese, Indonesian and Filipinos each represent 1.9%, British make up 0.5%, Indian, 0.4%, Pakistani, Australian, Nepalese, American, Thai and Japanese each make up 0.2% and 0.8% are classified as Other (Census and Statistics Department[CSD], 2012).

History. Evidence of life in the Hong Kong area dates back at least 30,000 years. Hong Kong also featured in Chinese imperial history at least from the Qin and throughout the Qing dynasty. A series of wars between Britain and China led to the eventual handover of Hong Kong to the British government. In 1841/1842 Hong Kong Island was ceded followed by parts of Kowloon in 1860. The New Territories were leased to Britain on a 99 year lease in 1898. Hong Kong was returned to China on 1 July 1997 and is now a Special Administrative Region of the Peoples Republic of China.

Patterns of migration and impact on demography

Source

Chou (2012) has made the point that “Hong Kong is an immigrant society as immigration has been one of the major sources of its population growth in the past century.” The main source of immigrants for Hong Kong has always been and remains Mainland China. In the nineteenth century, the flow was largely unchecked but over time stricter controls have been put in place to stem the flow of Mainland Chinese migration to Hong Kong. Today, fifteen years after Hong Kong was returned to Chinese sovereignty, 150 entrants from the Mainland are permitted into Hong Kong daily. Comments made by Siu (2009) about immigration in the 1980s still apply today:

Although Hong Kong has been a land of immigrants and emigrants, a new social ethos emerged in the 1980s that centered on discrimination toward this population influx. Those who identified with urban Hong Kong society perceived the newcomers as rural and desperately poor. For example, the media popularized the images of “Ah Chan,” (a country bumpkin from the mainland), and *Sheng Gang qibing* (criminal mercenaries from Guangzhou). As these newcomers arrived in overwhelming numbers, symbolizing a China reeling from decades of isolation and deprivation, anxious Hong Kongers labeled them as *xin yimin* (new immigrants) to mark their differences in cultural orientation, social status and economic well-being from people like themselves

What has changed today, however, is that “the spouses are mostly migrants from different provinces who have worked in the urbanized delta region for years. They hold skilled industrial and service jobs. Many speak Cantonese and have frequently visited Hong Kong. Frontline community agencies find them networked and resourceful” (Siu, 2009). If the profile of these new

immigrants has changed Hong Kong people's attitudes towards them have not At the time of community discussions on the proposed Racial Discrimination Ordinance, the point was often made that while the so called "new immigrants" were to be excluded from the provisions of the Ordinance that they nevertheless continued to suffer from severe forms of racial discrimination (Hong Kong Human Rights Commission, 2007, p.3). In 2006, there were 217, 103 immigrants from the Mainland who entered Hong Kong representing 3.2% of the population (CSD, 2007a, p.18)²

While cross border migration has been the main source of immigration to Hong Kong, there have always been, and continues to be, migration from some Western countries and other parts of Asia As pointed out in the figures highlighted in the Background section of this paper, the main sources today are from the Philippines and Indonesia and this migration is largely in the form of foreign domestic helpers. There have been historic patterns of migration for South Asian groups such as Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese and these continue today so that there is a small South Asian community in Hong Kong. The status of these groups is not often related to immigration as such since many South Asians families have two to three generations in Hong Kong so in reality they can be considered as Hong Kong "residents"³ although not necessarily Chinese citizens. There continues to be a flow of South Asian immigrants into Hong Kong although there does not seem to be any official statistics concerning these since they appear not to be officially regarded as "immigrants" in the same sense as those from Mainland China. Small numbers of Thai, Japanese and Westerners tend to take up professional level jobs for limited periods of time. 6.4% of Hong Kong' population can be classified as ethnic minorities. (CSD, 2012, p.37).

Education Levels

Over 77% of new immigrants who had been in Hong Kong for less than seven years in 2006 had education levels either at secondary/6th form level(69.7%) or post secondary(7.9%)(CSD, 2007a, p.31). Of the total number of new immigrants in 2006, at least 29.2% were of preschool or school age, but since the age categories tabulated were 0-14 and 15-34 there would also have been others in this latter category but it is not possible to disaggregate school age and non-school age students (CSD, 2007a, p.20). Of the 2006, ethnic minorities in Hong Kong in 30.3% had post secondary education,. Some groups exceeded this figure (for example for Westerners, Japanese and Thai the figure was closer to 70%) and for Filipinos it was 33% (CSD, 2007b, p.44). There were 23,444 ethnic minority students under the age of 15 studying in Hong Kong schools and 5,728 over 15 studying in schools and other educational institutions (CSD, 2007b, p.51)

Motivation

Mainland Chinese immigrants must obtain a 'one-way permit' to enter Hong Kong and this is controlled by the government of the People's Republic of China and not by Hong Kong laws or regulations. In general 'one-way permits' (together with a 'certificate of entitlement') are available only to close relatives of Hong Kong residents and right of abode in Hong Kong for children will only be granted if at least one parent was a permanent resident of Hong Kong when the child is

² This is the most recent census data. A census was conducted in 2011 but the full results have yet to be made public.

³ Residents may be either "permanent" (a status granted after 7 years residence) or 'non-permanent' where individuals are working on short term work visas. The rights of permanent and non-permanent residents are guaranteed under *The Basic Law*, Hong Kong's mini constitution.

born.⁴ The Chairman of Hong Kong's Equal opportunity Commission has asserted that "our young people need to know that the Hong Kong dream is possible for all, whatever their ethnic background" (Lam, 2011). There is other literature as well that makes a similar point: whether it is family reunion, work related opportunities or access to education: both ethnic minorities and new immigrants come to Hong Kong in search of a better life. This is also true for foreign domestic workers and professional workers – Hong Kong offers opportunities not available in respective home countries. For countries such as the Philippines, it has been estimated that remittances from labour exports have accounted for more than 20% of export earnings and 5% of GDP (O'Neil, 2004).

Gender

Based on 2006 figures, 14.2% of the total number of new immigrants were female and under 15. 25.86% of those aged between 15 and 34 were female and 27.3% of those aged between 34 and 65 were female. 2% of the total number of entrants over 65s were female. This means 69.3% of the total entrants in 2006 were female and 30.7% were male (CSD, 2007, p20)⁵. In 2006, 77% of ethnic minorities were female. 4% were under 15 years age and of those 48% were female. The total number of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong was 342,198.

Illegal immigration

Table 1 shows illegal Mainland immigrants for 2010 and 2011. The Hong Kong SAR

Table 1: Illegal Mainland Immigrants in Hong Kong, 2010-2011

	2010	2011
Forged travel documents detected	1 299	829
Mainland illegal immigrants apprehended and repatriated	2 479	1 748
Illegal workers prosecuted	^3 415	#2 377
Employers of illegal workers prosecuted	351	355
No. of prosecution instituted	8 340	7 084

^ including 1 741 prosecuted for illegal employment and 1 674 prosecuted for involving in sex work

including 1 358 prosecuted for illegal employment and 1 019 prosecuted for involving in sex work

Source: Immigration Department: http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehtml/facts_4.htm

government has dealt with a wide range of issues relating to both ethnic minorities as well as new immigrants from the Chinese Mainland. At times claims are made under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, especially from South Asian and African overstayers (Security Bureau, 2009). It has been estimated that in 2010 there

⁴ This has been a very controversial issue in Hong Kong leading to local court cases and a ruling from the National People's Consultative Committee, a Mainland legislative body.

⁵ 60/150 one way permits are designated for children and 30/150 are for spouses who have been separated from their husbands for 10 years or more (CSD, 2007a, p. 8.).

were 10000 illegal immigrants in Hong, 2,400 of whom were from Pakistan (*Daily Times*, 22 May 2010). Asylum seekers, are classified as illegal immigrants in Hong Kong because the Territory is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Impact of immigration

The absolute numbers of new arrivals in Hong Kong is relatively small but they nevertheless face the usual difficulties of resettlement, access to the labour market, language etc. There is a tendency for groups to settle in lower socioeconomic geographic areas of the city. Wong (2002) has identified the coping strategies used by immigrants from the Mainland when they settle in Hong Kong. Both new immigrants and ethnic minorities below the age of 15 face particular difficulties related to schooling that for the most part is conducted in Chinese.

Education is available at different levels for all new arrivals but at primary, secondary and vocational levels language of instruction is problematic. Even where new comers can master spoken Chinese the challenge of writing is more than most can handle. This then affects entry to university that requires both English and Chinese as entry level subjects.

Most new arrivals from the Mainland or South Asia are able to find low skill jobs. Foreign domestic helpers must have a job before arrival. Professionals must also have a work visa, guaranteed by a local employer.

There is no formal policy on multiculturalism supported by the Hong Kong SAR government. Nevertheless, the government articulates a vision of a tolerant and harmonious society. In a recent response to a question in the Legislative Council, the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs responded that “Hong Kong is a multi-cultural international city and a harmonious community with heterogeneous diversity. Local residents and incoming visitors may have diverse cultural background, ways of living and social systems. It is our common hope that all people can live together in harmony, with diversity and inclusiveness under the common values of mutual understanding and respect (Press Release, 2012).

Policy issues

Schooling is a fundamental issue for those new arrivals of school age who cannot afford to pay fees in international schools. The Hong Kong SAR government provides adequate funding but based entirely on a premise of integration. Thus native languages are not encouraged in the schooling context and a significant emphasis is placed on learning Chinese. At the heart of the issue is the need for a second language curriculum in Chinese pushed strongly by ethnic minority advocates but rejected by education authorities. The results are declining participation rates after primary school dwindling to almost zero by university. Funding has been provided for in-service teacher education especially focused on language teachers. There is little or no attempt at the system level to incorporate a multi-cultural perspective in the curriculum. NGOs such as Hong Kong Christian Service have taken up the issue of multiculturalism with their initiative on Multicultural Education @Schools.

All new arrivals have the right to 9 years of compulsory education but according to the Global Detention Project (2009), “unauthorized minors are subject to detention” and “asylum seekers are denied access to health care, education, welfare, and housing”.

There is no specific immigration data publicly available in Hong Kong on migrant flows. Census and By-Census reports are the most explicit sources of data.

There are 23 NGOs that provide assistance to immigrants and they can be accessed here:

(<http://www.pathfinders.org.hk/uploads/file/Organisations%20working%20with%20Migrants%20in%20HK.pdf>)

These NGOs play a fundamental role in supporting immigrants providing a range of services including political advocacy

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