

Reverse Brain Drain in Hong Kong?

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Two important historic events have provided passionate reference points both for the Hong Kong residents who are immigrating and for those who are returning from abroad. One was the *Tiananmen* Incident in June 1989, which ended with the bloody crushing of the student democracy movement. The other is the looming hand over of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to China on July 1, 1997. The professional class in Hong Kong -engineers, scientists, academics, lawyers, doctors, accountants and managers- have been under tremendous pressure to re-evaluate their loyalty to Hong Kong.

Many have in fact voted on this matter with their feet. For those who have left Hong Kong in search of a better environment for career and family, adjusting to a new culture and coping with prolonged economic stagnation in the West has posed great challenges. By contrast, they saw that the economy in Hong Kong kept booming in spite of the political dark clouds hanging over the last days of this prosperous British colony. Thus the resulting reverse brain drain.

From the late 1980s, immigration to countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia became commonplace. And it was the professional class that benefited most from the generous immigration policies of these countries that wanted to attract skilled and wealthy people to boost their economy.

But into the mid-1990s, another trend was making itself increasingly apparent. Many of the Hong Kong immigrants, who had by now acquired a foreign passport as a kind of political insurance policy, were flocking back to Hong Kong for what they now saw as better career opportunities. They reasoned that should the situation in Hong Kong worsen to such an extent that they had to leave, they could always return to their adopted countries.

As Hong Kong thrives on its well-developed commercial resources and infrastructure, which in turn are skillfully managed by highly professional and cosmopolitan people, stabilizing the phenomenon of brain drain vs. reverse brain drain seems to be a logical priority for the present and future Hong Kong governments. However, there has been little research that provides a basic insight into the composition, mentality and dynamics of this important segment of the Hong Kong population.

This paper is an attempt to understand the Hong Kong returnees : their views on the future of Hong Kong, their career aspirations, their sense of belonging and their role in merging cultures east and west. Much of the data are based on my intensive interviews in December 1994 with Hong Kong professionals. These are supplemented by my continuing observation of Hong Kong affairs in the course of my radio production for the BBC World Service, which covers China and the Chinese people.

The 1997 Factor

In anticipation of the hand over of sovereignty back to China on July 1, 1997, many Hong Kong residents have considered immigration plans for themselves and their children. According to estimates by the Hong Kong government, there are about 450,000 foreign pas-

sport holders among the 6.3 million people in Hong Kong. But other sources, such as newspaper surveys, easily double that number to about 900,000. And these do not yet include holders of the British National (Overseas) passports offered by the UK to about three million Hong Kong residents as travel documents (but with no right of abode in the UK). The jittery mentality in Hong Kong was illustrated by the deadline of March 31, 1996 for submitting applications for the BNO passports. For a long time, many believed that the BNO passport was worth little because it did not allow the holder to live in the UK. Thus they waited until the last two days of the deadline and then scrambled to get one. After all, having one more passport still gave you that much more sense of security, however limited it might be.

But for those who have already solved the immigration problem -or some would even say, having served the immigration sentence (i.e., having met the residence requirements for acquiring a foreign passport), their major concerns are whether or not the 1997 hand over will be a deterrent to their future prosperity, should they decide to return to Hong Kong. I met in Hong Kong people from a cross-section of professions who had made the decision to return. They seemed cautiously optimistic about 1997.

One reassuring element for returnees working in Hong Kong is that most companies they work for are multi-national conglomerates. As Dennis Chiu of the Star TV network said, because the company had many operations in different parts of the Asia Pacific region, he felt he would have many opportunities to thrive in the company. And Hong Kong was not the only place he saw for career development.

Returnee lecturers in the seven universities told me that their cautious optimism rested on the belief that as long as they stayed away from politics they would be left alone. Though they expect some changes in high level positions, such as that of university president, they believed their expertise in teaching and academic research would be valued by the new government as important assets to keep Hong Kong competitive.

Perhaps Fai Au Yeung of the J P Morgan Securities Asia Ltd. reflects the mentality of many returnees when he gave this reasoning for his plan for 1997.

“ I think 1997 is a factor, but it's not a big factor. If I didn't have a British passport, I wouldn't have stayed here. I would have joined thousands of others in finding ways to get a passport or to get some insurance, so to speak. But will I plan to stay in Hong Kong for long? I really don't know. But one thing I know for sure. And that is : I wouldn't buy a house here even if I had the money, because I still have some concerns for the future...I don't care where I live. What matters to me is my job and career prospects. But of course, when you live in Hong Kong where you are among many friends, so much the better. I am still not planning to stay here for long. But who knows, perhaps after twenty years, I might still find myself here. ”

Reasons for the Reverse Brain Drain

The single most often cited reason for returning to Hong Kong after a period of immigrant life in the West is for a better job prospect. To start with, most of the people I spoke with had been selected as immigrants under the “ points system ” by countries such as Canada, Australia and the USA, whereby candidates had to score enough points in areas such as job skills, language, and suitability to live in a foreign place. In other words, they are in a class of professional and skilled human resources that a modern, developed society values. In turn, this desirability by the industrialized world gives them the mobility to up-root from one place and settle down in another.

Most immigrants left Hong Kong, during the late 1980s, a time that coincided with the economic recession in most Western countries. It was therefore not surprising that most Hong Kong immigrants found it hard to get jobs suited to their experience and qualifications. And many had to switch to completely different jobs, accepting whatever was available. They said that this was the price they paid for their family and for the future of their children.

Esther Chow in the new City University of Hong Kong was such an example. She qualified for immigration to Canada in 1987 but did not leave Hong Kong until 1989, because giving up her job as an executive officer at a health centre was too dear a price to pay. After settling down in Toronto, she was in fact lucky enough to find a similar job, counselling Chinese immigrants. Her husband worked in real estate. Both seemed to fit into the Canadian society quite well as both had spent years studying for degrees from a Canadian university. But as soon as they fulfilled the requirement for a Canadian passport, they returned to Hong Kong for better career prospects, reasoning that in Canada, they could see where their careers would lead in the next 10 years or even to retirement. But in Hong Kong, the potential for change and the pace of development would offer them huge opportunities. And it was this kind of excitement and work ethic in Hong Kong immigrants that seemed to make them feel uncomfortable about missing out on the economic change taking place there.

Another reason often cited for returning to Hong Kong was related to the family. Even those who have lived in the West for a long time and feel well adjusted to the way of life there, had to consider how they should care for their elderly parents. Some have made arrangements for their parents to live with them but find that the elderly members of the family would rather live in Hong Kong in the familiar linguistic and cultural milieu. The strong sense of filial piety and family responsibility dictated that someone from the family, preferably the oldest daughter, should not be too far away. That sometimes meant they could live together in Hong Kong, which solved the expense and problem of finding another accommodation.

For those born in the West, another reason is returning to their roots. Others want to offer their children a Chinese learning environment, and make a lot of money before retiring to the safe havens in the West. The main barometer for Hong Kong's viability, its economic growth, has been strong, despite political hiccups and fears that the Hong Kong way of life would be lost after 1997. As professionals, most returnees would have established their careers before returning to Hong Kong. For many, they had to balance between maintaining a stable but less upwardly-mobile career in the West and taking a somewhat unknown but potentially rewarding chance by returning. But for some, the process of reverse brain drain has been a long and determined one.

For example, George Yip, a lawyer in Hong Kong told me that after living in Australia for more than 30 years, he still needed to take an examination in London to qualify for private practice in Hong Kong. Otherwise he would have to work for seven years in the Hong Kong law department before being allowed private practice. He said that he saw great potential for legal work in Hong Kong as the whole system had to be made suitable for the new government after 1997. And it was with this conviction that he took the trouble to prepare and successfully sit the examination in London before going back to Hong Kong. Job satisfaction from contributions to the legal reform in Hong Kong, from working with academics and legal professionals in China, surpassed any sacrifice he had to make, he said. Mr. Yip further explained that he enjoyed an enormous sense of job satisfaction from a positive and substantive input into the legal reform process. He saw his value in the experience and familiarity with Western legal concepts and international conventions, which needed to be critically evaluated and incorporated in the new system. This substantive contribution through actual legal practice and consultation with legal experts in China, Mr. Yip believes, was better than acting simply as an on-looker, criticizing and commenting from a distance.

It seemed to me that although better financial rewards play a role in the returnees' decision for the reverse brain drain, a deeper level of job satisfaction and the belief of greater career potential in

the future stands out as the most important factor. This combined with their immigrant experience, in which the economic downturn and cultural adjustment in a new country may have pushed their desire to go back to Hong Kong for a second chance. In order to investigate this aspect of the immigrant psychology, I asked my interviewees about their sense of belonging. In other words, how do they see themselves : whether they perceive themselves as Hong Kong residents, citizens of their adopted country or world citizens who possess the skills best suited to the needs of Hong Kong ?

Sense of Belonging

Many of the Hong Kong professional returnees who have filled important positions in scientific, medical, legal, business, financial and management fields received their education and training in the West. Some had substantial working experience in big multi-national companies. But their personal up-bringing and cultural heritage has been largely Chinese. For them, the process of immigrant life had brought to greater relief the continuing process of re-affirming and re-establishing their personal identity. Some found integration into the mainstream culture in the West easy and suitable to their personality and values, while others never felt comfortable with the life-style, work ethic or the general value system of their adopted land. However, without a systematic measurement, no pattern has emerged whereby the cultural orientation or psychological traits of the returnees can be summarized. I will, nevertheless, offer a few observations by way of illustration.

Dr. Donald Tang returned to Hong Kong to be a lecturer at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University after serving more than 20 years with a big company in Australia. Even though quite comfortable in a senior position of the company, Dr. Tang felt that he lacked challenge in the generally more laid-back environment there. He particularly disapproved of the welfare state system there where he felt the hard-working must subsidize the lazy through a harsh income-tax regime.

On the other hand, Mr. Fai Au Yeung at J P Morgan Securities immigrated at the age of eight, and went through a process of negating his own Chineseness only to become more aware of his own cultural heritage. During his school years, he deliberately distanced himself from anything Chinese and tried to be like the other boys, adopting their mannerism, their language, their tastes and hobbies, etc. while avoiding any Chinese friends. Sometimes he felt he was "white." He was particularly against a common phenomenon in the West where many Chinese socialized with their own by forming Chinese societies, clubs, etc. only to find themselves isolated in the Chinatown ghettos, outside the mainstream culture.

For someone as well integrated into the mainstream culture as Mr. Au Yeung, why was it necessary to go back to Hong Kong? Well, a perception of racial discrimination seemed to be at play. Mr. Au Yeung said that as he rose through the ranks in a merchant bank in the UK, he felt he had reached a glass ceiling. He had to work extra hard to get the credit he deserved. And even though there was no hard evidence, to him, the sense of racial discrimination was palpable. That kind of feeling actually turned his interest into finding out more about who he was, and his interest in China and Chinese issues grew. For a while, Mr. Au Yeung had difficulty reconciling his cultural affiliation : whether he was Chinese, Hong Kongese, or British. In the end, he gave up the effort because now he saw himself as a human being with a unique set of values and skills.

This mentality, as I discovered, was quite common among Hong Kong returnees. Even for those who had grown up and worked in Hong Kong, immigrant life in the West had changed their perception of the self. To be sure, some claimed to be more Canadian, American, or English than Chinese in their cultural traits, while others claimed the opposite. But they no longer saw themselves as a "true" Hong Kong resident or a "true" Westerner.

On the issue of discrimination, most interviewees felt that it was more a perception than a deliberate or tangible act. And this belief was closely related to the process of cultural integration in their immigrant life. Patrick Chan was a returnee from Canada working for a Hong Kong government department. He recalled that he had the feeling of being discriminated against soon after he immigrated. He was overcome by a great sense of frustration while looking for jobs, as many employers required Canadian experience. But when he later became more integrated in the country, he as he saw it was whether as an immigrant he regarded himself an outsider or part of the community. Anyone who treated himself as an outsider in the first place could not expect others to treat him as an insider, he said. To him, a lot of the perception of discrimination started with self-discrimination. And Mr. Chan said that by taking the citizenship of a certain country, an immigrant had sworn allegiance to that country, embracing its cultural values at the same time. And that, in theory, should be the culmination of the process of cultural integration.

Professionals from Mainland China

Among the returnees to Hong Kong, a significant minority are people who were born in China but had spent a number of years in the West studying and working before being attracted to Hong Kong. And since 1990, the Hong Kong government has adopted a policy of accepting a very limited number of senior professional people directly from China to fill in some important positions. Here we are not concerned with them, but with mainland Chinese “returning” from the West. Most of these expatriates with a mainland Chinese background came to Hong Kong with a foreign passport or permanent resident status in a Western country.

In the academic world, the expanding university system has been actively recruiting people from the West in order to maintain a standard comparable to universities in Europe and North America. And it is here that many mainland Chinese were attracted. For one thing, the financial reward of working in a Hong Kong university was among the highest in the world. Secondly, some of the Chinese students who had left China for the US, Canada and Western Europe in the 1980s for overseas graduate studies found that upon completion of their Ph.D.s or even post-doctoral research, academic jobs were far from plentiful in the West. Thirdly, the combination of knowledge about China or the Chinese way of thinking on the one hand, and Western education and training on the other puts them in an advantageous position in Hong Kong, the gateway between China and West. Finally, those who could neither integrate in the West nor tolerate the political restriction in China, found Hong Kong a happy compromise.

Dr. Xiaobin Zhao, a lecturer at the Hong Kong Baptist University, told me excitedly that a researcher of social scientific issues of China, he found Hong Kong the best place in the world, with its proximity to China but without the ideological strait jacket one would find in the Chinese academic world. He said that,

“ living in Hong Kong, you can feel the pulse of China. you can feel how severe high inflation is or how serious a political or economic situation has developed. You just can't help but feel it. The first hand information you can so easily obtain is vital to the social sciences researcher. But if you are in the US, you will probably get second- or third-hand information. And you might find it too late even when you get it. ”

But in anticipation of the hand over of Hong Kong back to China in 1997, people in the social scientific fields have begun to feel the pressure of self-censorship. Some newspapers and magazines have been forced out of business by the withdrawal of advertising funds from companies that did not want to be seen supporting dissident media. Even the government-funded television station RTHK has been demanded air time for pro-Beijing propaganda.

But David Tsui, who received his B.A. in China and spent years in the USA and UK while doing graduate studies, believed that there was a place for people like himself to help bridge social scientific knowledge between China and the West. The journals he published in Hong Kong, *Chinese Social Sciences Quarterly*, *China and the World* and *Chinese Book Review*, brought together scholars from China and the West to the same forum to discuss and debate issues of common interest. Mr. Tsui said that at the beginning, there were concerns that his academic journals might suffer from censorship by authorities in China or self-censorship by contributors. But later he discovered that with the relatively more liberal atmosphere in Hong Kong, there was a welcome need to introduce new social scientific information and international standards to China, and to introduce Chinese scholarly works to the West. As an example, he said finding a consensus about the proper way to present ideas in academic journals was one of his achievements.

“ In some articles, the authors from China used other people’s quotations without attributing them to the original source. They considered this too pretentious or unnecessary. Even some senior scholars held this viewpoint. But we told them that it was absolutely necessary because you needed to show how your own thinking had developed and how you built on other people’s previous work to push the frontier of knowledge forward. ”

With a network of friends, colleagues and family members in China, the Chinese overseas student returnees in Hong Kong are well positioned for the future, when Hong Kong’s interaction with China will accelerate. Dr. H. Leung of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University said the network of alumni had helped him establish academic links and joint research projects with China. His mainland Chinese background also helped him in the hiring of a research assistant from China, who was more dedicated to the work at hand because of the Hong Kong immigration restrictions on alternative employment for mainland Chinese workers in Hong Kong.

Due to the linguistic and cultural differences between Hong Kong and mainland China, Chinese overseas student returnees had to put up with some inconveniences in their daily life. Ms. Dian Wang, senior legal counsel at the multi-national company Duracell, told me that fortunately, the language at work was mainly English. She had no difficulty at all communicating with her colleagues. And once in a while, she would use Chinese in writing letters to clients in China. But for life in Hong Kong outside work, Ms. Wang had this observation :

“ Over the years, I have noticed some changes in the way ordinary Hong Kong people treated people from mainland China. When I first came to Hong Kong in 1987, there was a very clear line between Hong Kong people and mainlanders. Some shop-keepers were very reluctant to serve you when they knew that you were from China. We were treated like second class citizens or country bumpkins. But now you can see signs ‘Chinese money is welcome!’ and ‘Putonghua (Mandarin) spoken!’ everywhere — in many department stores, restaurants and jewellery shops ”.

Westerners in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong government’s policy to localize the civil service has resulted in some of the highest level positions being filled by local Hong Kong residents. This trend seems to be in line with the looming transfer of sovereignty in preparation for future status as Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. As some of those colonial officials are packing up to return to their motherland ; other Westerners continue to arrive in Hong Kong to take up new opportunities. One such person was Christianne McFarlane from Canada, who is married to a Chinese Canadian. Here is what she saw as opportunities for her :

“ The reason why my husband and I decided to come to Hong Kong was that both of us speak a background in fine arts, he has found a job in an interior design company. And I am working for Star TV, something related to what I did for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation back in Canada. ”

But there were challenges living in this densely populated city of 6.3 million. The pollution level, the high cost of living, and the political uncertainty were the trade-offs, but considering the career rewards, Ms. McFarlane said that it was worth the risk. She added that because she and her husband had lived in China for a long time, they were more prepared than others to deal with an authoritarian regime.

Interracial marriage has added a sense of multi-ethnic community in Hong Kong which, compared with China just across the border, prospers on pluralism. Another interracial family, the Glasspools, had lived in the UK for 16 years before coming to Hong Kong. One reason for the big move was so that their children could have the opportunity to be exposed to the Chinese linguistic and cultural environment. There were at times adjustment problems for the family trying to adapt to the social etiquette in Hong Kong. For example, they found they had not been spending enough time socializing with their colleagues and friends at dinner parties as local custom dictates. And their children found that frequently losing playmates and friends because of the mobile expatriate community was too stressful psychologically. So as if by instinct, they gradually established for themselves a network of friends who were neither totally native nor totally Westernized but a group of people with an understanding of the inter-cultural predicament.

Another type of Westernized people in Hong Kong are ethnic Chinese who were born and raised in the West. They came to Hong Kong partly to seek their cultural roots and re-assert their Chinese identity. To their delight, Hong Kong was quite receptive to this group of Chinese-looking people who in fact could not speak Chinese. Derek Yao was one such person. He had been made redundant in the UK before joining a management consultants firm in Hong Kong, where at the age of 28, he was given the responsibility of heading a team of Hong Kong colleagues. Apart from job satisfaction, Mr. Yao mused that he was actually doing what his father did decades before : trying to make a mark in an alien culture. As his father could not speak English, Mr. Yao wanted to find out more about the early experience of living in Hong Kong and to understand why his father had to engage in selling opium to “ white people ” at the time. The discovery of the past, the culture, the ancestry and the self in Hong Kong seemed to have some positive therapeutic effect on the self esteem of Chinese born in the West.

I was told by some of the interviewees that Hong Kong had been attracting more and more Westerners to do very ordinary work, a fact that contrasted quite sharply with the past when the senior positions were reserved for Westerners. For example, it was pointed out to me that Westerners could be seen in tourist areas hawking food. And another interviewee told me that when he advertised a secretarial position for his company, he received about 200 applications, most of them from Westerners. The relative receptiveness of Hong Kong to Western ideas and people was perhaps a reflection of its reputation as an international financial centre. Whether this competitive edge of pluralism can be maintained will hinge on the ability of Hong Kong to retain that cosmopolitan mix of professionals.

“ Astronauts ”

The decision to return to Hong Kong was by no means an easy one for many returnees and their families. Usually, one member of the family in their adopted country (in most cases the husband) spotted an opportunity for career development in Hong Kong and wanted to try to see whether it would be worth moving the whole family later. Thus began the life of an “ astro-

naut, ” a frequent flyer between Hong Kong and the country where the family lived. This kind of lifestyle has had a detrimental effect on many immigrant families. The absent parent(s) made it easy for youth gangs to influence school-aged children. In Canada, the country of first choice for most Hong Kong immigrants, youth gangs have targeted Hong Kong immigrant families so successfully for crimes such as extortion and fraud that some police departments set up special task forces to deal with this new social problem.

Therefore, many “ astronaut ” families tried to shorten the period of this lifestyle and become reunited as soon as possible. But even within a period of a few months’ separation, the disruption from an “ astronaut ” life-style on a normal family could be quite considerable. The Yau’s are such an example. Almost as soon as Dr. Wing Yau left London for an editorial job for a trade magazine in Hong Kong did his wife Ada and young children begin to feel the effect. Here was what Ada Yau said :

“ Immediately, the house seemed so empty, and how lonely my sons and I felt ! We suddenly lost someone to talk to and to rely on. And of course, there seemed to be more problems when my husband was absent. The car broke down one day, and I didn’t know what to do because normally my husband would be there to handle it...There was something wrong with the heating system, and I had to make a long-distance call to Hong Kong to ask him what to do...And my older son who is 10, missed his father so much that he kept asking when Father could come back, and I noticed him crying at night for not seeing him for so long. ”

As a matter of fact, the Yau’s had lived separate lives before, when for a while Dr. Yau had worked for a company in Manchester Monday to Friday and spent the weekend in London with his family. However, the distance between Hong Kong and London made it harder for him to shuttle back and forth as often as he would like to. Dr. Yau explained his feelings :

“ Initially, you would feel you had a little more freedom to be with friends and associates, to go month later, the loneliness began to creep in. You missed the family. And when there was an emergency back home, like the heating problem, you felt helpless. All you could do was to make more and longer phone calls. After a while, you might wonder whether you were working so hard just for the telephone company. Sometimes, in a quiet moment, I couldn’t help questioning myself : considering the cost, is it worth it ? ”

But another family, that of Dr. Peter Yu of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, did not seem to suffer too much the effect of the “ astronaut syndrome. ” The reason, according to Dr. Yu, was the age of his two children. One of them was in the third year of university in Canada, while the other was in the last year of high school. That meant that the children would be in Canada for a while. And both he and his wife would shuttle between Canada and Hong Kong. It seemed clear that the demand of the parents’ time by the Yu children was significantly less than that needed by the younger children of the Yau family.

To Leave or to Stay?

The push and pull factors are still playing out their forces and influencing the increasingly mobile professional class in Hong Kong. The “ one country, two system ” formula guaranteed by the Basic Law (a mini-constitution) for post-1997 Hong Kong promises to keep the present capitalist system in Hong Kong for at least 50 years. But at the same time, Hong Kong residents have noticed to their dismay events that have shaken their confidence in the integrity of that guarantee. Now it seems quite certain that the elected Legislative Council (parliament) will be replaced by one appointed by a committee that was hand-picked by Beijing. There are signs

that the press will be less free, with pressure increasing for censorship and self-censorship. And the fear that rule of law might be encroached on by the presence of the Communist Party in the legal system. The fear of the loss of independent legal and judicial power to fight corruption is perhaps the most realistic one, because most Hong Kong people attribute the city's success to a just and laissez-faire government.

For most in Hong Kong returnees who already have insurance policies in a second country, their plan is to stay in Hong Kong as long as they can until such time that the situation reaches a level beyond their tolerance. But according to the president of the Hong Kong Alliance for Chinese Expatriates (ACE), Mr. Guy Lam, this mentality can be a kind of self-deceit or self-assurance rather than a practical solution. He said that

“ many members and friends are lawyers and medical doctors. The fact that they have returned to political risk. After a number of years, if they suddenly decide to go back to Canada, US, UK or Australia, how can they re-establish the same network of clients? If they want to retire or are prepared to start all over again, that will be fine. But it would be wishful thinking to expect that you can simply pack up and go without sacrificing much of your career. ”

It is professional organizations like Mr. Lam's that will be playing an important role in lobbying for the interests of returnees. The legal status of returnees who are foreign passport holders as permanent residents of Hong Kong has been fought and gained partly through heavy lobbying of various professional bodies. Even the Hong Kong civil servants have not been immune from political interference when a high-ranking official from Beijing demanded their pledge of support for the Provisional Legislative Assembly to replace the elected Legislative Council. And again, their solidarity and professional reputation eventually saved them, making Beijing retract that demand.

There is no doubt that one element contributing to Hong Kong's unique place in the world, and in relation to China, is its ability to attract a dynamic and cosmopolitan group of professionals working in the financial, legal, public civil, and other sectors of society. And Hong Kong likes to pride itself on its professionalism and efficiency that rivals counterparts in the most developed countries. Recent statistics point to the fact that Hong Kong people have a better income per capita than citizens living in their traditional colonial home country, the United Kingdom. Despite criticism about the lack of a social welfare system to protect the sick and the poor, and despite being mocked for their workaholic lifestyle and crowded living conditions in a polluted environment, people live longer in Hong Kong than in the UK, let alone most parts of the Asia Pacific area.

The flow of professional people in and out of Hong Kong will probably continue after the sovereignty hand over. As professor S. L. Wong of the University of Hong Kong points out, the immigration policies of Western countries such as Canada, the US and Australia to attract professional people will not change in the near future due to their self-interest. And the annual immigration level in Hong Kong over recent years at about 50,000 to 60,000 is a reflection of those policies. One important effect is the increased mobility and internationalization of the Asia-Pacific middle class.