

On Hong Kong Talent Admission Schemes

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Abstract:

Since the 1997 handover, Hong Kong has faced both population outflows and economic shifts, prompting the government to design various schemes such as the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS), Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS), and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMTF). This paper divides current research results into two groups: “integration problem”, “current status of immigrants through admission schemes for talent,” and “mutual influence.” Many migrants experience difficulties integrating into Hong Kong society due to a variety of reasons. The current status of migrants through the talent admission schemes and other means of migration differs greatly; Mainland migrants also have a different quality of life compared to Hong Kong natives. Moreover, the demographic and political influence of Mainland migrants has reshaped aspects of Hong Kong’s governance. By synthesizing recent studies and official data, this paper provides a critical assessment of how talent admission policies intersect with immigration patterns, local integration, and long-term political and social transformation in Hong Kong.

Keywords: Hong Kong; Admission Scheme; Talent; Immigration.

1. Introduction

Since the handover to the PRC in 1997, Hong Kong has been experiencing an exodus, with much of its local population emigrating to the UK, Canada, and so on. Meanwhile, beginning in the 2010s, Hong Kong’s economic development slowed down compared to earlier decades. In the scenario, Hong Kong employed various admission schemes to attract talents from all over the world, China Mainland, to boost its economy. At the same time, some Chinese mainland residents view the talent admission system as an opportunity for further advancement. Under this broad context, the paper summarizes

current studies on the topic of Hong Kong talent admission schemes as well as the people entering Hong Kong through these specific schemes.

This paper explores Hong Kong’s talent admission policies, examining their implementation and effectiveness. It aims to assist prospective applicants in making informed decisions about applying for residency in Hong Kong, while also providing insights for the government of Hong Kong SAR to refine its talent admission strategies. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance talent development in Hong Kong and further promote its economic growth.

This paper explores immigration policies, the ad-

mission schemes for talents particularly in the official Department of Immigration of Hong Kong Government webpage. Moreover, this paper searches in CNKI, Jstor, Google Scholar, and other database using keywords such as “Hong Kong”, “Talent Admission” and “Quality Migrant Admission Scheme,” with the searching range being key journals. Close to 30 separate papers or books were found, and eventually 15 separate papers were employed in this paper.

2. Thematic Review

2.1 Introduction on Hong Kong Admission Schemes

The Hong Kong Immigration Department developed various programs through which talents from elsewhere can live and work in Hong Kong and thus contribute to Hong Kong’s development. Together these programs are named as “Admission Schemes for Talent, Professionals, and Entrepreneurs”, including seven separate admission schemes. The Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) aims to attract highly qualified individuals with substantial work experience and strong academic backgrounds from around the world. Those who satisfy one of the three categories (A, B, C) are qualified to apply for the TTPS. All three categories are extremely strict and extremely high to fulfill compared to other admission schemes.

Its visa renewal policy follows either the 3+3+3 or 2+3+3 model. That is, upon successful application, the individual is granted Hong Kong residency for three or two years. After three years, if renewal requirements are met, an additional three-year residency is granted. Upon meeting the renewal criteria again, another three-year residency is granted. After residing in Hong Kong for seven years, the individual becomes eligible to apply for permanent residency in Hong Kong (the same applies hereafter). The assessment committee will take various factors into consideration and approve applications based on the applicant’s fulfillment of the selection criteria. Approved applicants will be issued a visa and may bring their spouse and minor children with them. (same applies hereafter). Minor differences can exist among the seven separate admission schemes, but they follow the same pattern.

The General Employment Policy (GEP), restricted to non-Mainland residents only, is comprised of GEP for professionals and GEP for entrepreneurs. For GEP for professionals, key requirements include a job offer in a field where local talent is insufficient or unavailable, a salary package commensurating with the ongoing standard salary, and an educational background that meets the standard. On the other hand, key requirements of GEP for en-

trepreneurs include a good educational background and a position to make a substantial contribution to Hong Kong economy. Its visa renewal policy follows a 3+3+2 model. Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (ASMTTP) is basically the GEP for professionals exclusively for China Mainland residents, with key requirements being the same. Its visa renewal policy generally follows a 3+3+2 model.

The Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) is the most popular admission scheme among foreign talents and Mainland talents. People applying for this scheme are subject to specific eligibility requirements and will be assessed via one of the two assessment routes, the General Points Test and the Achievement-based Points Test. The prerequisites include age, good character, financial requirements, and academic background. For the General Points Test, applicants have to meet at least six of the twelve assessment criteria in order to receive consideration, which includes criteria based on various fields, for example “Whether the applicant is proficient in written and spoken English”, “Whether the applicant has no less than five years’ graduate or specialist level work experience”, and “Whether the applicant currently owns a listed company.” For the Basic Academic Qualifications, applicants have to meet one of two criteria in order to earn consideration, which includes awards, an Olympic Medal, for instance, and acknowledged work in a field, a lifetime achievement award from industry for instance. Recent changes in the policy made the scheme stricter, as the General Points Test was changed to meeting at least six out of twelve since November 1st of 2024. Its visa renewal policy generally follows a 3+3+2 model.

Companies allocated a quota by the Innovation and Technology Commission are authorized to sponsor eligible applicants for employment visas. After this, foreign technology talents can apply to work in the city under the Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS). Its key requirements focus on mainly focus on technology. Its visa renewal policy generally follows a 3+3+2 model.

Non-local graduates may apply under the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG) to stay in Hong Kong for one year to look for a job. Its visa renewal policy generally follows a 2+3+3 model.

The Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents (ASSG) targets individuals who are second-generation Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents residing overseas. Its visa renewal policy generally follows a 2+3+3 model.

Most migrants from China Mainland enter Hong Kong not through the admission schemes for professionals and talents, but through the One-Way Permit Scheme (OWP) for family reunification. Note that the OWP is not part of

admission schemes for talents, but it accounts for the majority of the immigrants from China Mainland. In 2023, a net inflow of 51,700 Hong Kong residents was recorded, with an inflow of 40,800 One-way Permit holders [1].

It is evident that Chinese people are targets of the admission schemes, for many of the schemes are exclusively for Chinese people. Moreover, most successful applicants for these programs are from mainland China, making up 95 percent of TTPS participants and 78 percent of TechTAS recipients [2].

2.2 Integration Problem

Hong Kong admission schemes have been employed for more than two decades, however, according to sociologists, both in Hong Kong and China Mainland, and government officials, the results of the schemes cannot be counted as satisfactory, and the talents have a hard time suiting in Hong Kong's society.

The purpose of the schemes is to bring in talent from foreign places to boost the economy of Hong Kong, and the direct outcome of them is a talent influx. However, according to the Hong Kong Legislative Council, Hong Kong has experienced trouble in nurturing talent. Specifically, they believed that the policy outcome was not ideal in terms of nurturing talent. Though the schemes are a way of introducing foreign talents, the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates aim to keep the Tertiary education graduates in Hong Kong. Mainland students now account for 74 per cent of the city's pool of non-local, first-year students [3]. However, the IANG policy failed to keep the graduated students in Hong Kong for further employment. Legco attributed such a phenomenon to the current situation, rather than the scheme itself. Most of the Chinese students are not expecting to live or work in Hong Kong. Moreover, even with such inclination, the cultural difference between Mainland China and Hong Kong and Hong Kong's much higher daily cost is a gap too big to bridge for those students [4].

While the direct outcome of the admission scheme is the influx of foreign talents, these new talents can be an effective solution to the aging problem in Hong Kong as an indirect benefit. However, the admission schemes once again did not provide the expected help in the aging problem. Employment visas granted under the GEP represented just 0.74% to 0.83% of the overall labor force during the period from 2010 to 2013., and employment visas of ASMTTP represent 0.2% of the total labor force [5]. One reasonable cause of the below-expectations could be the unattractiveness of the policies, in other words, the lack of attractiveness of Hong Kong. Surveyed professionals from Mainland China and abroad identified housing afford-

ability, air pollution, and the availability of international education as major concerns. This means that the lack of infrastructure and its economic nature of Hong Kong have impeded its talent recruiting programs, and thus not contributed to solving the aging problem [5].

Mainland scholars also expressed the same view as above. Mainland talents could find it hard to look for jobs, or suitable jobs in Hong Kong, as their talents don't align with job vacancies and vocational distribution. The four biggest industries in Hong Kong are finance, tourism, logistics and trade, and professional services. However, most Mainland students in Hong Kong universities have displayed a strong preference for STEM. STEM researchers also constantly found it hard to be employed as Hong Kong doesn't focus on manufacturing and the technology industry. Besides career match, social adaptation is also key for Mainland talents deciding whether to stay or no. The median monthly income from main employment for Hong Kong residents with a university degree was HK\$21,250 in 2001 and HK\$25,000 in 2011. However, after accounting for inflation and other factors, the real monthly income of degree holders in Hong Kong showed virtually no growth over the decade. This situation has also negatively affected the willingness of mainland talents to stay in Hong Kong in the long term [6]. In 2019 to 2020, 82.5% of the IANG applicants had an income lower than HK\$40,000 and 35% lower than HK\$20,000. Moreover, housing problems have always been a problem in Hong Kong, as also pointed out by Legco. Many new immigrants could not afford the high housing prices in Hong Kong, and many were forced to live in shabby buildings with many other immigrants [7]. While a study conducted in 2008 seemed outdated, the Hong Kong housing problem has also remained for several decades. Furthermore, Mainland talent also encountered difficulty in being integrated into the Hong Kong society, with challenges such as fluency in Cantonese and specific cultural symbols. On top of that, integration into the society was also hindered by the anti-immigration sentiment among local residents. Hong Kong's local identity is associated with a higher level of anti-Mainland sentiments than that in Shanghai [8]. Precariousness, such as the significance of social and cultural dimensions, including familyhood and belonging, work and social legality, can be extremely disturbing to new immigrants [9]. To be simple, the talents refuse to live a life in Hong Kong where they are middle-class and outliers of the society, as they can be much more comfortable in the Mainland or other places [6].

Several studies above mentioning the lack of integration of Chinese immigrants in the society of Hong Kong, they did not provide concrete evidence or analysis of the conclusion. According to Feng, Hong Kong displayed strong

Humanistic care in terms of welcoming immigrant workers, especially through a series of social assistance and employment benefits. Feng even pointed out that Beijing's policies toward Rural migrant workers should be more friendly, and in fact, should draw inspiration from Hong Kong's policies [10].

2.3 Current Status of Immigrants Through Admission Schemes for Talent

As introduced previously, the OWP schemes brought the majority of immigrants into Hong Kong, however, the quality of these immigrants is comparatively lower than that of the talent admission schemes.

In 2006, the number of migrants admitted through schemes other than the OWP stood at 5,680, accounting for only 10.5% of OWP migrants. By 2016, this figure had increased to 38.8%, and by 2019, it reached 24,962, equivalent to 63.9% of the OWP migrant population [11]. Moreover, nearly 24,962 Mainland China migrants admitted under the talent admission schemes and the investment schemes entered the Hong Kong labor force in 2019. In contrast, only 13,669 (43.6%) OWP migrants aged 15 and above admitted in 2019 were in the Mainland labor force before their migration to Hong Kong [11]. This proves that migrants of the admission schemes for talent are much more competitive compared to those of the OWP.

Furthermore, new immigrants (arrived in Hong Kong between 2009 and 2016) also surpassed old immigrants (arrived before 2009) in various aspects, including average years of schooling, degree qualifications, and average earning ratio [11]. Note that new immigrants contain more of those who came through the talent admission schemes. The gap between Hong Kong-born residents and Mainland Migrants, regardless of different schemes, is also large. The five censuses from 1991 to 2011 indicate that native residents show a higher trend in home language use, Cantonese. Moreover, Hong Kong male natives had a significantly higher monthly wage than Mainland male migrants, with natives having approximately HK\$10,000 more than migrants at age 55. Furthermore, persons born on the mainland were less likely than Hong Kong natives to have received any type of postsecondary education [12]. Life quality of Mainland migrants and Hong Kong natives varies significantly, and the same for migrants of OWP and migrants of the talent admission schemes.

2.4 Mutual Influence

Mutual influence between the Hong Kong government and China Mainland migrants exists.

The Hong Kong government treated the OWP migrants and other migrants differently. Hong Kong tended to en-

tail offering the right of abode to highly-skilled migrants, through the talent admission schemes, while discriminating against those considered inappropriately skilled, such as poor family reunion migrants from mainland China using the OWP [13]. After the handover in 1997, hundreds of children born on the Mainland to Hong Kong residents made a claim to their right of abode at the Immigration Department; decades later, poor people in the Mainland made a claim to join their family in Hong Kong through the OWP [13]. The Hong Kong government discriminated against these poor people, in other words, those who could not contribute to Hong Kong [13].

Immigration also influences the Hong Kong government, as the migrants enjoy their voting rights. Mainland Chinese immigrants formed an important and solid base of support for the pro-Beijing conservative camp in the city's limited elections. While the pro-democracy opposition is losing its supporters due to massive emigration. Pro-Beijing camps provide activities and opportunities for the migrant professionals, thus lobbying them to vote for the pro-Beijing candidates in elections [14]. Due to the uniqueness of Hong Kong's elections' functional constituencies, employees in different fields such as finance and industry are crucial. While the talent admission schemes often place Mainland migrants in the position of management teams in those fields, the Mainland migrants represent key votes for the pro-Beijing camp in the return of members of the Election Committee, election of members of Legco, and District Council elections [15]. This creates a loop in which more Chinese migrants led the pro-Beijing transformation in Hong Kong, and the more similar to Mainland Hong Kong is, the more Mainland residents are willing to immigrate to Hong Kong as they enjoy the political status quo [14]. With more and more China Mainland migrants entering Hong Kong, and especially with more upper-level citizens being Mainland migrants thanks to the talent admission schemes, "this population swap may make Hong Kong more culturally and politically similar to the mainland" and may introduce a brand new identity to the city [2].

However, the role of China Mainland migrants as a decisive factor in helping to gain votes for the pro-democracy camp remains uncertain, as the evidence given by the studies mentioned above is neither strong nor detailed enough to lead us to a conclusion.

3. Conclusion

This paper summarizes current studies on Hong Kong talent admission schemes by dividing the studies in to three groups: "integration problem", "current status of immigrants through admission schemes for talent," and

“mutual influence.” In the first group, this paper draws the conclusion that Chinese immigrants are suffering from an integration problem, that they weren’t able to fully join the Hong Kong society, which also became a factor that hinders the success of those talent admission schemes. Furthermore, studies in the second group indicate that both the quality of the China mainland migrants and their life quality are comparatively lower to that of Hong Kong native people, and that the Mainland migrants through the talent admission schemes have higher qualities than those who entered Hong Kong through the OWP. The third group showcases that the Hong Kong government has shaped the distributive of people of different admission schemes, namely the talent admission schemes and the OWP, and in the meantime, China Mainland migrants in Hong Kong have shaped Hong Kong’s political and cultural environment by changing the demographics. Overall, the three groups cannot be separated by a firm line, as they are also important mutual factors to each other.

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