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Looking Forward



Looking to the Future

Learning from the past

Carew Chan discusses mainland arrivals in Hong Kong. She reminds us that many local people are second or third generation mainland immigrants themselves though some see the newcomers as outsiders.

The 20th anniversary of Hong Kong's reunification with mainland China is on 1 July 2017. It is a good time to ask ourselves how we should treat mainland immigrants in the city and I think the answer can best be found in the past.

Although Hong Kong was sparsely populated until colonial times, mainland immigrants have been coming here for centuries. Wars such as the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) and political upheavals from 1950-1978 meant that millions of mainland immigrants moved to Hong Kong during the 20th century, many as refugees.

There were three major waves of immigration, in 1945-1950, 1966-1968 and 1980-82. Sample figures show that three-quarters of a million arrived in the first quarter of 1950 alone.[1] This flow of mainland people southwards was in addition to two-way migration across a relatively unrestricted border in the early years. [See Figure 1.]

New arrivals included 56,000 illegal immigrants in 1973 and 100,000 in 1979[8], but many came here legally across a porous border until controls were introduced.

The majority worked in factories or as labourers but a significant number were industrialists who set up or transferred their businesses to Hong Kong.[9] Together, they made a major contribution to the early strength of the manufacturing-based economy and over time they became not only the backbone of Hong Kong's working population but also the main reason for its growth.[10]

In the earlier years, local people were sympathetic, providing new arrivals with food, clothing and even building materials to make squatter huts.[11] In 1962, over 2,000 Hong Kong residents even rushed to help refugees who were arrested as illegal immigrants.[12] There were no organizers and the helpers got nothing in return. Perhaps they remembered enduring similar hardships themselves.

Many of the immigrants were young and there was a 132% increase in Hong Kong's 15-19 year-olds from 1961-1966.[13] Local people, especially relatives and friends, served as a bridge, helping new arrivals to integrate into the community, find jobs and schools, adapt to local life and extend their networks.[14] Before political problems on the mainland prevented it, there was also a constant cross-border flow.

Figure 1 **Mainland immigration to Hong Kong**[2]

Years	Events	Population Growth	Approx. Population [in millions]
1901-1941		368,986 - 1,639,000[3]	1945: 0.6
1937-1945	**Second Sino-Japanese War**		
1945-1949	**Chinese Civil War**	Over 1 million[4]	1950: 2.5
1950-1978	**Political Movements**		
1951-1956	**Thought Reform Movements and Sufan movement**	2-3% annually[5]	
1956-1957	**Hundred Flowers Campaign**	2% annually	
1957-1958	**Anti-Rightist Movement**	Tens of thousands of refugees arrived in Hong Kong from mainland China	1960: 3.0
1958-1961	**Great Leap Forward**		
1966-1976	**Cultural Revolution**		
1978 onwards	**Period of economic reform and opening up**	Mainland China has administered the One Way Permit Scheme (OWP) since 1980. The quota is 150 per day.[6] According to the 2011 census, 93.6% of Hong Kong'se population is ethnically Chinese with 32.1% born in mainland China, Taiwan or Macau.[7]	1970: 4.0 1980: 5.0 1990: 5.7 2000: 6.65 2010: 7.024 2017: 7.375



Both locals and immigrants developed a shared Hong Kong identity, not only through solidarity and work but also through entertainment. Many film, TV and pop music stars were born in mainland China. Their memorable depictions of life in Hong Kong made them part of local culture.[15] As a result, there was no strong conflict between locals and immigrants in those days and by the 1980s, when the political environment on the mainland had stabilized, the major reason for immigration was for families to reunite.

The controversial One-Way Permit Scheme (OWP), administered by mainland China since 1980, allows residents of mainland China to settle in Hong Kong permanently. About 879,000 did so from 1997 to 2014.[16] The quota of 150 new arrivals per day allows a hypothetical total of about 55,000 per annum although this quota was not always filled. Official statistics[17]show that approximately 93% of population growth between 1997 and 2001 can be attributed to newly arrived mainland immigrants under the OWP.

Most immigrants are hard workers, but prejudice, discrimination and stigmatization of mainland immigrants has become common. Why? According to modern conflict theory,[18] resentment is often created by an unequal distribution of power and resources among social groups and this theory is applicable in Hong Kong where recent arrivals from mainland China are seen as outsiders. Locals who hold a protectionist view believe that the immigrants use resources to which they are not entitled, despite the newly acquired affluence of some.

Have we forgotten, or never known what it is like to be a stranger? Is it no longer possible to feel sympathy? If we could remember or rediscover such feelings we could begin to work towards unity and a better Hong Kong, not just for the newcomers, but for all of us. ■

Simmering tensions

Hongkongers blame mainland investors for pushing up property prices and have in the past protested against mainland women coming to Hong Kong to give birth. “Parallel traders” who buy tax-free products here and resell them for a profit across the border are also a bone of contention. However, overall attitudes may not be as negative as the media portrays them to be, according to a survey last year at the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. About 60% of respondents think that new immigrants place a strain on social welfare programmes but nearly 50% think they should not be isolated because “we are all Chinese”. Around a quarter oppose mainland immigration but slightly more say it is acceptable. About a third believe that new immigrants can counter the ageing population and enhance the city’s competitiveness with a larger labour force.

Source scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/2045204/hong-kong-media-vilification-mainland-chinese

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