

INDIVIDUAL ARTICLE

Studying where the jobs are: Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Purpose – Mainland Chinese students (hereafter called Mainland students) are a major source of international student applications. Some countries have initiated policies to enable Mainland students to stay and work after graduation. Additions to the literature, particularly more country-specific studies, are much needed to cast light on the employment issues for such Mainland students overseas. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap by focussing on Mainland students who have completed teacher education programmes in Hong Kong and then served as teachers in Hong Kong schools (Mainland teachers). The incentives that attracted them to stay and work in Hong Kong and the challenges they faced were examined. Their future plans were also probed.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted a mixed methodology. Data collection comprised both a questionnaire survey and interviews. The semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for respondents to explain their answers, to narrate and widen the scope of data to areas hitherto unanticipated by the researchers.

Findings – Mainland teachers were attracted to stay on in Hong Kong to work for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. They were in fact settlers. They found the programmes they had taken to be practical and believed that they had acquired a niche situation in the teaching profession. Working and living in Hong Kong was satisfying, but some experienced social distance from local colleagues.

Originality/value – The paper can be read with reference to countries that recruit Mainland students and there is a possibility that some of them may stay behind to work. It sheds light on the selection criteria of such students, on ways to enrich their programmes, as well as their employment, living and social integration issues.

Keywords Hong Kong, Teachers, Employment, Chinese students

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Some countries have initiated policies to enable Mainland Chinese students (hereafter called Mainland students) to stay and work after their graduation (Becker and Kolster, 2012). The increased role of China in the global economic arena and the importance of Putonghua and the connections that has built with China have indeed underpinned such developments. Cai (2014) and Teichler (2009) have pointed out that literature, particularly that with country-specific details, is now much needed to cast light on the employment issues faced by Mainland students in the host societies where they have completed their education. Our case study specifically targeted Mainland students who completed their teacher education programmes in Hong Kong and who then served as teachers in Hong Kong schools (Mainland teachers). How Mainland teachers evaluated the education programmes they took in Hong Kong, the incentives that attracted them to stay and work in Hong Kong, as well as the challenges they faced, were examined. Their future plans were also probed.



2. Hong Kong's educational context

Hong Kong ceased to be a British colony on 1 July 1997. A westernized school system, with compulsory and free primary and secondary education, had been developed during British rule. That system stood in stark contrast with that of the Mainland. Efforts have been made to continue keeping political indoctrination out of schools in the post-colonial era. The latest official document "Learning to learn – the way forward in curriculum development" (Curriculum Development Council, 2000) indeed required students to be good at communication, creativity and critical thinking.

Teachers were openly recruited based on merit and appropriate qualifications. Teachers were generally respected in society, although their workload was heavy. A school curriculum different from that of the Mainland and filled with western concepts was used. The most prestigious schools had been established by western missionaries. Expatriates were employed both in schools and in teacher training institutes.

The Basic Law, the mini-constitution of Hong Kong, allowed it to keep its own educational practices. However, many reform measures were introduced in the region's schools. More emphasis was placed on the project work of students, Putonghua was adopted for teaching the Chinese language and school-based curriculum development was introduced. There was a growing recognition of the value of extra-curricular activities for the holistic development of students.

Before 1997, very few teachers from the Mainland were teaching in Hong Kong. However, that changed recently when teacher education programmes at higher education institutes started to recruit Mainland students and when relaxed immigration policies allowed non-local students to stay on to find work. In the study conducted by the Hong Kong Ideas Centre (2013), respondents who came from the Mainland to study and work in Hong Kong ranked education as the third most important career. Now, Mainland teachers and expatriates (mainly from western countries) constitute the main body of non-local teachers in Hong Kong.

3. Literature review

Mainland students have become the largest cohort of the corpus of international students (Cai, 2014). There is now considerable interest in the employment of such sojourner students after their graduation. Labi (2010) explained from the US context that many Chinese migrant students treasured the opportunity to stay behind and work after graduation. Liu-Farrer (2009, 2011) argued that Chinese students could act as intermediaries with China if they stayed behind to work. However, Wu and Sheehan (2011) found that Mainlanders working abroad could experience social isolation. More recent works have indeed focussed on the employability of Mainland students in specific host countries (Cai, 2014; Huang, 2013).

Hong Kong stepped up its efforts to recruit non-local students after 2000 (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Hong Kong Government, 2007; Mok and Yu, 2011). Mainland China has been a major source of non-local students in Hong Kong (Bodycott, 2009; Gao, 2008; Sharma, 2011). In 2012/2013, for example, over 11,000 Mainland students were studying in the tertiary institutes sponsored by the University and Grant Committee of Hong Kong, accounting for over 80 per cent of the institutes' non-local students, and more than 10 per cent of the total student enrolment (University Grants Committee, 2014). Hong Kong has managed to attract a growing number of Mainland students to study in those education programmes offered by its tertiary institutes. Gao and Trent (2009) argued that extrinsic motives, such as professional stability and the prestige associated with speaking the English language, are important incentives behind this growth.

Mainland students graduating from higher education institutes are now starting to work in Hong Kong because the government has adjusted its immigration policies. Immigration Guidelines for Entry to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic

of China (Immigration Department, n.d.) allow non-local graduates a 12-month stay without conditions and this is helping Mainland students to find jobs in Hong Kong after graduation.

Pang (2012) explained that there has been a sharp increase in such applications in recent years. Important incentives for staying behind have been found to be the possibility of gaining permanent residence (Yau, 2012) and better pay and employment prospects in Hong Kong (Ho and Ho, 2012). Chen *et al.* (2008) have suggested that psychological adjustment, linguistic competence and an ability to adapt to different cultural identities are needed by such Mainlanders. *Eastweek* (2012) explained that the problems that Mainland students faced when they obtained work in Hong Kong included: social alienation from local Hong Kong colleagues; heavy work pressures; loss of self-identity, etc. Such problems can be further complicated by the recent tensions in the relationship between Hongkongers and Mainlanders.

Mainland students graduating from education programmes are also joining the teaching profession in Hong Kong. Complexities can result when students of Mainland origin are teaching in Hong Kong. In their studies of pre-service Mainland student teachers, Gu and Tong (2012) explained that pre-service Mainland student teachers in Hong Kong need to become multilingual and multicultural, while the problem of identity has also been reported (Gu, 2011; Trent and DeCoursey, 2011). On the other hand, Gao and Trent (2009) explained that the teaching context of Hong Kong, being distinct from that of the Mainland, poses a challenge to Mainland teachers.

4. The present study

The present study was conducted from 2012 to 2013 in order to explore the attractions, prospects and challenges of teaching in Hong Kong from the perspective of Mainland teachers. Their future career plans were also probed.

4.1 Research questions

The five research questions guiding this study were:

- RQ1. What were the reasons for Mainland graduates remaining in Hong Kong to teach?
- RQ2. Did they think that what they studied in Hong Kong helped them in their work?
- RQ3. Were they satisfied with their teaching jobs and lives in Hong Kong?
- RQ4. What were perceived by Mainland teachers to be their major challenges?
- RQ5. What were their future plans in terms of their careers?

4.2 Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methodology. Data collection comprised both a questionnaire survey and interviews. The questionnaire survey aimed to generate initial quantitative data from responses to preset questions. With this initial understanding, the interviews were planned. The researchers shared the concerns of grounded theorists that the theories would not necessarily be obvious from the data extracted from the survey and would need to be unearthed. The interviews provided opportunities for respondents to explain their answers, to narrate and to widen the scope of data to areas hitherto unanticipated by the researchers.

Convenience sampling was used as part of the data collection. Mainland teachers were invited to join the study via a social network which the researchers used. In order to make the sample more representative, the study covered teachers of both genders in private and public sector schools. The choice of respondents was limited to those who had taught in Hong Kong for not less than one school semester since graduating from a Hong Kong tertiary institute (as otherwise they might not have had enough valid experience to share about working in Hong Kong).

In total, 55 respondents accepted the invitation to join the study. They completed a standardized questionnaire that was pilot-tested before implementation. A total of 55 returned valid questionnaires were used for this study. The respondents came from 17 different provinces and comprised eight male and 47 female teachers. They taught different subjects at different school levels: primary ($n = 23$), secondary ($n = 21$) and kindergarten ($n = 11$). The results of the questionnaire survey were processed with the help of IBM SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, namely the percentage distributions of responses, etc., were worked out so that the researchers could discern the trends of responses. Cronbach's α were also reported. Each of the factors had a standardized Cronbach's α coefficient greater than or equal to 0.70 (Table I) and they were reliable in terms of overall internal consistency.

In total, 18 respondents accepted further invitations to attend individual interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and the interview guide merely indicated a number of broad questions that the researchers considered to be worth asking after reading the survey results. Wengraf (2001) explained that in-depth interviews can be partially prepared and jointly produced by the interviewers and the interviewees. Glesne (1999) proposed that new questions that emerged in the course of an interview could be added to, or even replace, the pre-established ones. These proposals were followed because they were considered instrumental to support the building-up of the grounded theory (Glaser, 2002; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The researchers gathered pertinent concepts and views from the narratives in the interviews that would help to generate the required theory.

All of the interviews were taped and transcribed so that the researchers could study the text and refer back to the soundtracks whenever doubts about interpretation arose. In analysing the qualitative data, the researchers adopted the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Interview transcripts, including all narratives and incidents cited, were compared in order to look for emerging concepts, theories and patterns. The researchers shared the qualitative data they collected and made decisions together on such matters as the interpretation of the data and the point of data saturation, etc. This helped to avoid excessive subjectivity in inference in the process of theory building.

4.3 Research protocol

The protocol for this study protected the confidentiality of the respondents by:

- (1) non-disclosure of the respondents' names;
- (2) non-disclosure to the public of the soundtracks from the interviews;
- (3) non-disclosure of the names of the schools in which the respondents worked; and
- (4) non-disclosure of the names of the institutes/universities at which the respondents studied.

This allowed the respondents to speak out about what they really thought to enhance the reliability of the data collected.

Items	Cronbach's α
Extrinsic motives for working in Hong Kong	0.729
Overall assessment of education programmes in Hong Kong	0.775
Overall assessment of teaching conditions in Hong Kong	0.837
Overall assessment of living conditions in Hong Kong	0.849
Major challenges of living and teaching in Hong Kong	0.707
Future plans	0.827

Table I.
Scales used in the
study and reliabilities

5. Findings

This section reports the findings we obtained from both the questionnaire survey and the interviews. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, on which “3” denoted “neutral”. A tendency of support/agreement/satisfaction was expressed by the respondents when the mean score was higher than 3, whilst the opposite was true when the mean score was lower than 3. Excerpts of the respondents’ discourses are given alongside the survey results so that readers can understand, not just the answers the respondents chose in the survey, but also the reasons behind their choices of answers.

5.1 Extrinsic motives for Mainland graduates to remain in Hong Kong to teach

The extrinsic motives for teaching, as defined by Gao and Trent (2009), refer to those motives related to the attractions external to teaching itself. Table II summarizes the importance of the extrinsic motives for Mainland teachers to take up teaching in Hong Kong.

The top three most highly rated extrinsic motives were higher salaries in Hong Kong (mean = 3.70); better career paths in Hong Kong (mean = 3.59); and the international environment in Hong Kong (mean = 3.52). A better quality of life and political freedom also ranked highly with means of 3.50 and 3.45, respectively.

Why was Hong Kong perceived to offer better career paths to these Mainland Chinese teachers (mean = 3.59)? Some respondents explained that teaching in Hong Kong could acquaint them with modern teaching methods and some appreciated that a meritocracy was upheld in Hong Kong. They explained that Mainland teachers benefited by becoming part of a niche sector of the employment market. The growing importance of Putonghua and the increasing number of cross-border students (students living in the Mainland and studying in Hong Kong schools) gave them an advantage teaching those students.

Considerations related to the quality of life (mean = 3.50), as the respondents reported them in the interviews held, included good law and order, a very convenient transport system, a lively city with lots of entertainment and excellent food. Hong Kong’s designation as being an “international city” (mean score = 3.52) was based on the co-existence of different cultures and nationalities in the city, its open society, the ease of applying for visas for travelling abroad and the presence of foreign colleagues.

The mean score for factors such as using Hong Kong as a springboard to move to foreign countries and using the experience of working in Hong Kong to gain an advantage when moving back to China were lower than the neutral level of 3. This indeed made our case about Mainland teachers noteworthy. It contradicted the findings of a report about

Table II.
Extrinsic motives
for working
in Hong Kong

	Mean	SD	Not at all important (1) (%)	Not important (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Important (4) (%)	Very important (5) (%)
Higher salaries in Hong Kong	3.70	1.10	6	9	16	45	23
Better career paths in Hong Kong	3.59	1.08	4	10	33	29	24
Hong Kong is an international city	3.52	1.24	12	7	19	40	21
Better quality of life	3.50	1.09	6	6	44	21	23
Political freedom	3.45	1.15	9	6	34	32	19
Intention to immigrate	3.13	1.33	16	16	28	21	19
Gaining working experience before returning home	2.88	1.34	19	19	29	16	16
Springboard to other countries	2.81	1.24	15	30	25	19	11
Families and friends here in Hong Kong	2.24	1.36	42	24	13	13	9

Note: Cronbach’s α : 0.775

Mainlanders studying and working in Hong Kong conducted by the Hong Kong Ideas Centre (2013), which indicated that only 28 per cent of Mainlanders would prefer to stay and work in Hong Kong on a long-term basis, whereas 72 per cent were reported to prefer either to return to the Mainland or leave for overseas. This point will be dealt with again in the discussion in Section 6.

5.2 Did Mainland teachers think the education programmes that they studied in Hong Kong helped them in their careers?

Participants were asked to assess the education programmes they completed in Hong Kong. Table III reports the ratings that respondents gave to their education programmes.

According to the survey results, Mainland teachers believed that the education programmes that they completed in Hong Kong helped them to get teaching jobs (mean = 4.26) and to become effective teachers (mean = 3.85) in Hong Kong. The following excerpt explains how the education programmes made them effective as teachers:

I learnt about the local education system and policies. I had got a lot of teaching experience before I came out to teach. I had learnt different teaching methods too. Besides, there was immersion as part of my course and this strengthened my English too.

In the interviews, the respondents explained that teaching on the Mainland required a certification of its own. Besides that, the open methods used in Hong Kong, which often asked students to express different views, would not necessarily match well with those teaching styles commonly practised at Mainland schools.

5.3 Were Mainland teachers satisfied with their jobs and their lives in Hong Kong?

Mainland teachers were asked to evaluate their satisfaction levels with their current teaching posts. Table IV shows that apart from their workloads (mean = 2.44), Mainland teachers found their jobs in Hong Kong satisfying. Salaries and relationships with students were ranked the highest factors in creating satisfaction (mean = 3.67 and 3.62, respectively).

How Mainland teachers rated their lives in Hong Kong is summarized in Table V. According to the survey results, Mainland teachers found living in Hong Kong satisfying due to its low crime rate and its high degree of political freedom (mean = 4.09 and 3.98). However, this satisfaction did not extend to housing (mean = 2.78). Accommodation costs in Hong Kong are indeed among the highest in the world (Global Property Guide, n.d.). This can be more serious for Mainland teachers because they live away from their families.

	Mean	Strongly disagree (1) (%)	Disagree (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Agree (4) (%)	Strongly agree (5) (%)
My degree helps me find a teaching job in Hong Kong	4.26	2	6	11	27	54
My degree helps me become an effective teacher	3.85	4	17	9	30	40
My degree makes me marketable in Hong Kong's education sector	3.75	6	9	17	40	28
My degree makes me marketable in China	2.96	10	28	28	28	7
With my current Hong Kong degree, I should be able to change career easily	2.43	17	39	29	10	4

Note: Cronbach's α : 0.775

Table III.
Assessment of
education programme
completed
in Hong Kong

Table IV.
Mainland teachers'
assessments of
"teaching in
Hong Kong"

	Mean	Strongly dissatisfied (1) (%)	Dissatisfied (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Satisfied (4) (%)	Strongly satisfied (5) (%)
Salary	3.67	0	7	27	57	9
Relationship between you and your students	3.62	0	7	34	47	11
Applying what I learned	3.39	2	15	36	35	11
Social relationship between you and your colleagues	3.31	4	11	42	35	7
Future prospects	3.22	7	7	46	36	4
Workload	2.44	18	36	31	13	2

Note: Cronbach's α : 0.837**Table V.**
Mainland teachers'
assessments of "living
in Hong Kong"

	Mean	Strongly dissatisfied (1) (%)	Dissatisfied (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Satisfied (4) (%)	Strongly satisfied (5) (%)
Crime rate	4.09	2	0	18	47	33
Political freedom	3.98	0	2	24	47	26
Overall social and cultural environment	3.43	0	11	43	39	7
Standard of living	3.41	2	13	37	39	9
Overall social and cultural discrimination	3.16	0	15	56	27	2
Housing	2.78	15	26	35	18	7

Note: Cronbach's α : 0.849

The Hong Kong Ideas Centre (2013) also reported from its study of Mainlanders studying and working in Hong Kong that the most serious observed challenge was unsatisfactory accommodation (with 73 per cent support).

5.4 What were perceived as major challenges by Mainland teachers?

The majority of Mainland teachers (Table VI) ranked handling heavy workloads (mean = 4.08), small living spaces (mean = 3.90) and the high cost of living (mean = 3.88) as

Table VI.
Major challenges of
living and teaching
in Hong Kong

	Mean	Not at all important (1) (%)	Not important (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Important (4) (%)	Very important (5) (%)
Heavy teaching workload	4.08	2	4	20	32	42
Living space is too small	3.90	5	3	22	37	33
Too expensive to live	3.88	0	8	29	32	32
Social and cultural differences	3.22	12	5	41	32	9
Language differences	3.03	18	15	27	25	15
Social and racial discrimination	2.78	14	8	63	14	0
Difficult for Mainland Chinese to move up the career ladder in Hong Kong	2.69	13	28	38	17	4

Note: Cronbach's α : 0.707

their most serious challenges, whereas the language barrier was considered to be of marginal importance (mean = 3.03). There could be two reasons for this. On their programmes, as well as in their campus life, they already had opportunities to gain proficiency in the local language. This can be illustrated by the following observation:

I picked up the local language very quickly during my studies. The teachers on my Commercial Studies course spoke in Cantonese. The local students spoke in Cantonese as well and there were just a few of us (from the Mainland). So, I learnt Cantonese this way.

Mainland teachers reported that they did not face much social and racial discrimination in Hong Kong (mean = 2.78), but there were social and cultural differences. Whether this would hinder their social networking with local colleagues should be researched further.

5.5 What were the future career plans of Mainland teachers?

The Mainland teachers (Table VII) did not intend to be transient. Continuing to teach in Hong Kong had a mean score of 3.80, while staying in Hong Kong to do further study had a mean score of 3.83. Mainland teachers expounded in interviews how further study in Hong Kong could strengthen their teaching career prospects locally. "Moving back to China to teach" and "Staying in Hong Kong to work in other fields" were not important (mean = 2.33 and 2.88, respectively).

6. Discussion

By examining both the qualitative and the quantitative data in the previous section readers may understand the answers the respondents chose in the questionnaire survey and their reasons for choosing them.

We shared the grounded theorists' concerns for needing to unearth the stories behind the data. By allowing the Mainland teachers to speak freely and to pick up any themes they deemed appropriate in the interviews, the researchers could go beyond their own imagined causes and effects and break the limitations of a standardized questionnaire. We have reported such discoveries here.

Our questionnaire survey suggested that extrinsic values were important for working in Hong Kong. However, two of the teachers' narratives in the interviews indicated that intrinsic motives (Gao and Trent, 2009) were important too:

I want to stay in Hong Kong to teach because teaching in Hong Kong is comparatively more autonomous.

Teaching in Hong Kong attracts me because it is more flexible and you can encourage your students to practise critical thinking and have independent minds.

	Mean	Not at all important (1) (%)	Not important (2) (%)	Neutral (3) (%)	Important (4) (%)	Very important (5) (%)
Further my study in Hong Kong	3.83	6	6	27	22	38
Continue to teach in Hong Kong	3.80	4	4	31	33	29
Move to other countries to teach	2.90	14	19	38	22	8
Shift to another career in Hong Kong	2.88	12	19	46	16	7
Move back to China to do other work	2.62	21	19	38	19	2
Move to other countries to do other work	2.49	24	22	39	14	2
Move back to teach in Mainland China	2.33	28	33	19	17	2

Note: Cronbach's α : 0.827

Table VII.
Future planning

Although Mainland teachers found Hong Kong attractive as an international city, they indeed had mixed feelings about such internationalization. The following narratives came from two different teachers:

Hong Kong absorbs different cultures and things [...] she has been able to absorb many different languages, foods, work and people from other countries.

There are some aspects in fact that [suggest] the city may not be so international. Not all people here have the so-called international perspective. It actually depends on the educational level of the person.

Interestingly, all Mainland teachers emphasized that their international outlook in education and teaching was enhanced by studying and working in Hong Kong. The following are quotes from different teachers:

The programme we took had a lot of Western concepts and theories about curriculum design and teaching. We were taught by professors from many different countries too.

We [have] become more international as there are exchange programmes and immersion arrangements.

Schools in Hong Kong organize a lot of exchange activities with other countries. There are also teachers from other countries at the schools [in which] I serve.

The questionnaire survey findings suggested that Mainland teachers did not experience serious cultural and social discrimination (mean = 2.78), but the score for social and cultural differences was much higher (mean = 3.22). We found mixed feelings about this in interviews.

Some Mainland teachers believed it hindered social networking. The following excerpt expresses this:

Mainland teachers can only be good friends with their own kind. [...] It can be language. They (Hong Kong colleagues) are not willing to speak to us in Putonghua, without which it is difficult to communicate in depth. It can also be [a matter of] culture.

On the other hand, some Mainland teachers attributed the social gap more to personality traits and adaptability. The following discourses were typical of this view:

It's not a problem for me. My students like me [...] I also do well with my colleagues. We are friends and dine together. When people say they have problems (making friends with local colleagues), it can be an individual personality problem [...] You are not ready to open yourself and from the beginning consider yourself as a Mainlander, different from local colleagues.

Some (Mainland teachers) can be too sensitive and find it too easy to say that they are being labelled.

Now we turn to some of the findings in this study to see how they may be tied up with findings from other researchers, as reported in the literature review.

Gao (2008) found that the lack of a social network could become a challenge for Mainland students who stayed behind to work in their host countries. On the other hand, Trent and DeCoursey (2011) emphasized the need for the formation of new identities by Mainland teachers in Hong Kong. In this study, social distance with local colleagues was reported by some teachers. Ngo and Li (2016) explained that the ability to pick up a localized identity is positively related with sociocultural adaptation and the satisfaction of Mainland Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong. However, in the narratives we collected, Mainland teachers also indicated that personality traits and coping skills were decisive. Having an open mind and being active socially could break down such distances between Mainlanders and Hongkongers.

Gao and Trent (2009) reported that Mainland students needed to face the challenges presented by a new teaching context should they stay to teach in Hong Kong. Mainland teachers in our study confirmed this, but they went on to express that, once adapted, new

elements (like autonomy and developing an independence of mind amongst their students) made a teaching career in Hong Kong more satisfying and this acted as an incentive to continue working in the city.

Liu-Farrer (2009, 2011) argued that Chinese students could act as intermediaries with China if they stayed behind to work. In this study, one Mainland teacher explicitly mentioned that she would be a cultural intermediary, but many Mainland teachers emphasized the niche they had found for themselves helping Hong Kong schools to cater for those students who had Mainland origins (i.e. new immigrants and cross-border students).

Gu and Tong (2012) explained that pre-service Mainland student teachers needed to recast their ideologies and cultural beliefs in the Hong Kong context, including becoming multilingual and multicultural. Our study found that open-mindedness and being socially active could help to deal with these challenges. How these should affect the selection of Mainland students and the introduction of support measures for them need to be investigated further.

We found the language issue is complicated. Due to the residence requirements of the education programmes and their immersion arrangements, the use of both the local language (Cantonese) and English was not considered to be hindrances to Mainlanders at work. However, at a social level, some Mainland teachers indicated that their limited proficiency in Cantonese and their different cultural backgrounds could make it difficult to build social ties with local colleagues.

The push-pull model originally used in the theory of migration (Lee, 1966) has been used in the literature to explain international student flows. The decision or motivation to study abroad, according to the model, results from two parallel sets of factors (Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Lu *et al.*, 2009). The push factors in the home country motivate students to study abroad, whilst the pull factors in host countries draw students to them. Our study has suggested that this conceptual framework can also be adapted to theorize about Mainland students' employment in the cities where they have studied. Two parallel sets of factors are at work. Push factors on the Mainland encourage students to teach elsewhere and include lower pay, lack of professional autonomy, etc. On the other hand, the extrinsic pull factors of Hong Kong comprise higher pay, the promise of permanent residence, the opportunity to learn English, the lack of social discrimination and the international nature of the city. Intrinsic pull factors include professional autonomy, opportunities to teach using innovative methods and being able to help students to be independent thinkers. The education system of Hong Kong, built up through its unique history and preserved under the "one country, two systems" principle, is actually behind many such pull factors.

The perceived usefulness of the local education programmes in preparing for effective teaching could enhance the self-efficacy of Mainland teachers and thus reinforce the strength of those pull factors. On the other hand, the perceived social distance from local colleagues and the high accommodation costs in the city could work to undermine the pull factors.

7. Conclusion

Our study pointed out that Mainland students studied in Hong Kong to become teachers for both extrinsic motives and to take advantage of the opportunities for professional development that are realizable there. Mainland teachers believed that the education programmes on which they studied at the local tertiary institutes helped them to establish themselves as teachers in Hong Kong. They were basically satisfied with living and working in Hong Kong amidst concerns about their workloads and the high cost of accommodation. That said, Hong Kong was certainly considered to be attractive by them. Mainland teachers should not be considered as "transient" workers, although some of them did report difficulty in building interpersonal relationships. This difficulty of creating local

social networks was also reported by other researchers. Ma and Wang (2015) also explained that interpersonal relationships were the most difficult areas of sociocultural adaptation for Mainland Chinese sojourners in Hong Kong.

First, countries considering employing Mainland students to work after graduation should ensure that the content of the education programmes offered to Mainland students fit with the actual needs of employment and they should equip them with new perspectives, skills and knowledge not acquirable in their home country. When these elements are later reflected in employment opportunities, they can provide strong intrinsic incentives indeed. Exposure to the local work, culture and linguistic contexts are important. Second, on admission, the screening should comprise attitudes favouring intercultural adaptations such as open-mindedness and active social attitudes. Attention should be paid to keep the set-up costs, particularly the cost of accommodation, affordable to Mainland students. Finally, as they are not intending to be transient workers, any planning for Mainland students' employment after their studies should be considered on a long-term basis, and factored for alongside broader population policies.

There are limitations inherent in this work. This is a small-scale study and, though we tried to make the sample representative, the extent to which our results could be generalized should be treated with caution. Nonetheless, we hope that this study will cast light on the direction which further research should take and that it will be of reference value to researchers, managers of institutes and policymakers who are concerned with Mainland students and their employment in the cities where they have studied.

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