

The Cream of the Crop Does Not Necessarily Fancy Hong Kong

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Recently there have been suggestions (again) of allowing (more) people from Mainland China with the required skills and talent, especially those in the financial and IT aspects, into Hong Kong, in addition to allowing those who are already studying at one of our universities to stay if they can manage to have a job offer etc. Opinions from society vary. Supporters say Hong Kong needs these skills to survive while opponents want the government to take care of local workers, with some fearing this might be another way to increase the workforce supply in order to control / reduce overall wage levels.

The author inclines to **welcome good talented people with open arms giving them a fair chance to prove themselves**. First, this is more in line with the spirit of "competition" (aren't we [suppose to be] a competitive society that embraces competition?). Second, closing our doors does not guarantee the existing workforce would fair better. As for controlling overall income and wage levels, it is almost impossible to offer only peanuts to the best and brightest for too long a time (and expect them to stay etc), maybe a year to two at the most depending on industry.

But the aim of this article is NOT to dwell on the rights and wrongs, good or bad, workable or not workable etc of the issue. **The hypothesis to convey is this = the best and brightest from Mainland China may not come in flocks to work here** or make Hong Kong their (long term) home [as some local people think], and this is based on the following observations (especially among Mainland friends / acquaintances who having graduated from leading universities there such as Tsing Hua, Beijing etc had also attended some of the best universities in the States or UK and are now working in very responsible positions mostly for multi-national corporations):

A) **In terms of career or work, Hong Kong may not be the / a first choice:** For instance, those in the financial fields may wish to gain experience or "learn their trade" in New York City or London, particularly when these cities offer more in terms of the comprehensiveness of the range of financial products, tools and trading networks. For those who wish to build their career or business in China, Shanghai in the long run makes more sense, being a, if not the, economic barometer of China. It is not that Hong Kong has nothing good to offer, just that it may not be the overall first choice for them. Furthermore, these people have been relocating to the cities mentioned above way back in the early or mid-1990s, i.e. it has little to do with the subsequent Asian financial crisis which in turn might have made career opportunities scarce

thereby requiring them to relocate. Many ended up in Hong Kong because the companies they work for sent them here.

- B) In terms of real estate (home-buying) investments, Hong Kong is also not a first choice:** Whether this is right or wrong, most of them feel Hong Kong properties do not offer value for money, and one cannot blame them, because for a HK\$2-3M (US\$250,000 - \$400,000) budget, they can afford to buy the best locations in the major cities in China, while in Hong Kong such a property would still not be much of a show (a high rise unit of around 450 – 650 ft² net floor area in an urban or suburban setting). In addition, the companies they work for are likely to offer them housing / extra allowances in Hong Kong so that the need to acquire a home in Hong Kong is generally reduced.
- C) The chance to utilize their full range of skills is higher in Mainland China:** First, they speak the language and they understand the business and social cultures in Mainland China. Second, their learnt skills and experience acquired are precious to a developing economy (and the multi-nationals who like to do business there) like China. Third, they can make better use of their professional and business networks. All these meant a better chance to create more opportunities, financial wealth and / or career satisfaction etc for themselves in Mainland China in the long run.

Again, the author stresses that this does not imply Hong Kong has nothing good to offer, just than after more than 20 years of economic development, the gap in every sense of the word between a few major cities in China and Hong Kong has become smaller, i.e. while the “cream” might have wanted to come to Hong Kong badly in the early 1980s, it does not necessarily follow the intensity to do so today remains as high. Given all likelihood, it will be **Hong Kong’s fortune to have part of this cream here#**.

#Note = for those remaining skeptical, just visit New York City and a few of the smaller (more provincial so to speak) cities in the States and ‘feel’ the difference, and possibly one would start to realize the reason(s) for the suggestion here. **A “closed doors” mentality does not synch with the aspiration to become a world-class city or even a major regional city.** And this affects not just the economy or its development, but also in terms of having an overall healthy societal psychology, culture, perspective and horizon.

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