

主旨: humble opinions

Dear Madam,

I have read "Thoughts for Hong Kong--Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy".

My views on Chapter 4--importation of low skilled workers are as follows:

1)The full scale roll out of the mandatory buildings inspection/windows scheme is a new(in the sense of vastly expansion of)aspects in construction maintenance work.This has resulted in a number of recent incidences where in the latest case for owners of Mankei Building in Homantin (press report of 23 December,2013) had to call off the renovation work of the 48 year old building for the high costs(estimated \$200,000 per unit.).Here, I declare my interest as I lived in an estate of 38 years and is going down the route of Mankei!

For my estate, the renovation exercise has been going on since 2005(management office formally consult owners) but is now in the appointment of consultant stage.So my suggestion to kaifongs is that we can consider an inflated estimate of cost for the renovation to the tune of 20% --30% of the quoted estimate of 2005.Otherwise,most owners will become the meat in the sandwich--they cannot qualify for the assistance of \$40,000 nor can they easily afford the higher estimate like Mankei owners.Importation of labour might be a solution to contain teh costs.

The point here is that in rolling out schemes like mandatory buildings inspection it would be useful to assess the labour market in support of that scheme.A proposal to import skilled labour of a certain number would have made such schemes more affordable.So no assistance but make things more affordable(first point).

I will turn to the source of labour later.

2)Low skilled vs skilled workers.Importation of skilled workers could bring in eg skilled workers for steel scaffoldings as opposed to bamboo scaffoldings.The cost for the former might be higher in setting and in current labour more difficult to engage such skilled workers. But such skilled abound in other countries--and unfortunately for some going through a low level of construction activities. --For domestic helpers,one can consider to import workers with higher language skills as au pairs.For au pairs,their background is slightly different to the domestic helpers as we know them And both au pairs and metal scaffolding workers do not infringe the turf of imported/local workers in Hong Kong.For metal scaffolding workers they are to meet demands for a vastly expanded area of buildings maintenance work.

Now to the source of imported workers.Hong Kong has "Youth work holidays" agreements with UK,Ireland,Canada,Australia all English speaking countries.For some of those countries it will not be difficult to envisage the supply of labour in the categories named in 1) and 2) above.As for sustainability,construction work in European countries is seasonal ie little work in winter and more demand in summer.So in this part of the world one could mop up the surplus of labour seasonally and during low activity level, like now.Using these agreements to meet immediate demands for skilled labour might be considered seriously. Although these agreements are designed to enable a broader level of cultural exchange.

I submit that there is an urgent need to import skilled labour to make renovation building works more affordable to Hong Kongers. It will also allow time to train up locals who will join the construction industry. In my humble view, the demand for such labour will become more acute as more over 30 years building come under inspection. As for the social impact of the importation of such skilled labour, the long term impact is small--how many Europeans have fallen into CSSA over the years? Not many that I can recall. With the import of their collective language skills, it might even make the \$480 million scholarship funding less immediate. After all, there will be more opportunities of use of English in the community--one would hope!

Last but not least, the chemistry of international multicultural cities like New York, London and Sydney (middle-eastern foods of late) is to allow more cultures to vie and survive in that community. And in the name of the natural law of survival of the fittest the best bits of that culture will remain in that community/city. Hong Kong will do well to continue to act as the melting pot for different cultures. Thus enhancing our role as the "window of the world" to China--version 2014 and beyond.

Merry X'mas and a Happy 2014.

andy yeung
(retired civil servant)