

Views on Population Policy

The Consultation Paper on Population Policy is a very important document as contribution to it will directly affect the future wellbeing of everyone in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, part of the consultation period overlaps with that on political reforms and is overshadowed by the latter. We do not find much discussion on the subject in the media or public forum.

Concerns

2. The Paper rightly points out that we are now facing critical challenges as our population is ageing and ageing fast, within years the labour force is declining and the birthrate is among the lowest in the world. The concern is that not only economic growth cannot be sustained but also the living standard cannot be maintained.

The Suggested Answers

3. The suggested answers in the Paper, one of which is “to make the cake bigger”. It is much easier to say than done. Hong Kong has its natural constraint. Take the example of tourism: hotels cannot be built overnight and the location of immigration check-points is difficult to find.

4. Similarly it takes decades to diversify the economic base. These are our strategic objectives but they cannot be treated as immediate solutions to relieve the population problems we are facing imminently.

Unleashing the Potential of Existing Population

5. To that respect the Paper has suggested several possible ways. Encouraging female homemakers to work or re-join the economic labour force. Will that diminish the motherly care for young ones, which is very valuable? Similarly, delaying the retirement ages may sacrifice the health or shorten the period of enjoyment in the final stage of life, not to mention that many grandparents are helping to look after the young ones. My point is that the promotion of family welfare is a much more important issue than enhancing economic growth. Neither am I convinced that these two sources can produce much effective results. Those who are willing to work have already found their own ways to adapt to the working conditions.

6. The more critical problem is the skills mismatch. Public has the traditional mindset that university degree is much better than any other training. The young people are reluctant to go through vocational education and training without a degree. They firmly believe that only university degrees will help them move up in the social ladder. The measures taken by various professions unwittingly lend support to such misconception.

7. For example, formerly people with working experience in law firms could become solicitors by passing the Solicitors Qualifying Examination. A university degree was not a prerequisite. Since the establishment of Law School in universities, that route of passing Solicitors Qualifying Examination is no longer available; no matter how long a person without a law degree has worked in a solicitor firm does not have the chance of getting qualified. This blocks the upward mobility of young persons who have failed to gain entry to Law School.

Population Growth

8. The natural way is to increase the birthrate. This requires the individuals, particularly the young persons, willing to take up the responsibility of raising families. Promotion of loving families in the community should be strongly supported.

9. The real answer is to maintain our existing immigration policy which is rational and effective. The daily incoming of 150 for family reunion is absolutely necessary on humanitarian ground. The different programmes like the GEP and the ASMTP will definitely increase our workforce very substantially: each of the last two years we have seen not less than 80,000 potential talents.

The Problem of Integration

10. It is not easy to maintain the existing immigration policy as the anti-mainlanders feeling is unreasonably and unacceptably strong. Locals should not regard them as “locusts” while the newcomers should not distinguish themselves as a separate sector. Mainlanders and local people are all within the “one country”. People should not be treated differently among themselves.

International Outlook

11. Hong Kong is acclaimed for its international outlook. It is noted with much regret that the Court of Final Appeal in cases FACV 19 & 20/2012 upheld the decision of the Court of Appeal which overturned the Court of First Instance decision. The decision that has been overturned is to allow foreign domestic helpers who have worked here

for 7 or more years qualified to become permanent residents in Hong Kong. If that decision had not been overturned, economically it created a substantial amount of workforce.

12. I do not know how to answer the moral question: the existence of a person who has devoted 7 or more years of her prime time to a place and has only been rewarded much less than the minimal salary stipulated by the statute is ignored, is it right for a cosmopolitan to do?

Dated the 19th day of February 2014

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Chan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chan Cheuk Christopher