

Study on the Talent Introduction Policy for the Sustainable Development of Islands

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Abstract. One of the key factors in achieving sustainable development for islands is to ensure the availability of sufficient talent. As the 'Western Region in the East', China's islands face the situation of inactive development and are in urgent need of talent. However, except for very few islands, most have become caught in the plight of the outflow or insufficient introduction of talent. Pingtan Islands, a comprehensive experimental zone, free trade zone and international tourist destination, is also facing the problem of talent introduction. On the basis of analyzing its talent introduction policies, this paper points out that it is necessary to hierarchically and dynamically adjust the talent introduction policy and refine the regulations. In addition, it is proposed to evaluate the results of talent introduction on a quantitative basis, e.g. from the amount of talent introduced, population growth, and total consumption, in order to further improve relevant policies.

Keywords: Island; sustainable development; talent policy; Pingtan Islands.

1. Introduction

China has more than 10,000 islands (Deng, 2015a). Many small isles, besides a few large islands, have chosen sustainable development as part of their management strategy (Kerr, 2005). However, one of the most critical elements for sustainable development and good governance of all islands, despite the differences in their geographic location, size, topography, economic and social development, as well as their different perceptions of the specific goals for sustainable development (Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien, 2005), is innovation, which is necessary for the changes required (Kemp, Parto and Gibson, 2005) by sustainable development. Whether it is innovation or change in governance, a group of courageous talent is needed to achieve sustainable development by breaking stereotypes along with adopting new ideas and methods. Past experiences tell us that one prerequisite for this is the availability of enough talent.

2. The Status Quo of Island Population

Islands, except for a few large ones, mostly have limited populations due to their inconvenient transportation, fragility, vulnerability to disasters, and limited environmental resources. Fishery is the major industry for islands. As we look at the fishery population, we can see generally active social mobility of island fishery population and an obvious upward trend that is affected by many factors (Liu, 2014). In general, China's population flow, as the world's largest-scale human migration (Gong, 2012), features an obvious eastward tendency (Lei et al., 2013). On the contrary, the islands, as an important part of the eastern region of China, have not benefitted from population growth. Instead, some islands even faced negative population growth (Xu and Zhang, 2013).

To a certain extent, many islands, although located in the eastern region of China, face the same difficulties of talent introduction as western China. If an island, regardless of its major industries, wants to achieve sustainable development, the intensity and speed of talent introduction, policies and procedures, and the follow-up system to attract and retain talent are extremely crucial. This paper used Pingtan Islands as an example to analyze the policy trend and put forward suggestions for the improvement of talent policies for China's islands.

3. The Talent Introduction Policy of China's Islands

Regarding the talent problem faced by China's islands, researchers suggested as early as 1986 that the key to develop the economy of islands is the harmonized coordination of talent development (Jin, 1987). In addition, there were some studies on the cultivation of talent in island-related industries (e.g. Zhang, 2007). Talent policy should focus more on the prevention of talent loss than talent introduction. Or it may be said that it should prevent a situation where talent outflow exceeds talent inflow. The rate of talent loss is determined by multiple factors, including the natural conditions, social environment, economic conditions (mainly personal income) and policy orientation in a specific stage of social development. Pingtan Islands, located in Fujian Province, is a comprehensive experimental zone (approved in 2009), a free trade zone (approved in 2014) and an international tourist destination (approved in 2016). As an emerging city, it still has many shortcomings, such as its weak foundation for economic growth, inadequate industrial support capacity, underdeveloped social undertakings, low quality of public services, fragile ecological environment, tensions between economic development and environmental protection, a lack of high-level professional talent, and cadres whose overall quality needs further improvement (National Development and Reform Commission, 2011).

The *Regulations of the Pingtan Comprehensive Experimental Zone on Strengthening the Introduction of Medium and High-level Talent (Trial)* was issued in June 2014 as this island's first talent introduction policy. In January 2017, the implementation rule of the Regulations was announced. Not long ago, another official document known as the *Interim Procedures of the Pingtan Comprehensive Experimental Zone on Strengthening the Introduction of Medium and High-level Talent (Interim Procedures)* was issued on June 24, 2019. This is Pingtan's latest policy on talent introduction.

The Interim Procedures are mainly aimed at attracting medium and high-level talent that is urgently needed to promote Pingtan's economic and social development. It requires the talent introduced to live and work in Pingtan. This talent is divided into two levels, namely high-end talent (Class A) and medium and high-level (Class B), with each including three subcategories. Since Pingtan Islands is an emerging city (Deng, 2015b), it has been attempting to catch up to its counterparts. In essence, the Interim Procedures is one of the many policies intended to attract talent. Preliminary analysis indicates that the supporting measures in the Interim Procedures are very similar to those in the Regulations. Considering inflation, the sum of subsidies provided through the Interim Procedures is even lower than before in real terms, and the only improvement is in healthcare.

The Interim Procedures is a typical example of the talent introduction policy of China's islands. It fails to develop the advantages of an island and provides only limited assistance for its sustainable development with relatively low talent inflow. In 2018, the talent introduced to Pingtan totaled 151. They all belonged to Class B, including 3 B1s, 41 B2s and 107 B3s. However, this number is nearly negligible when compared to the population of Pingtan (420,000) or the 10,000-plus talent introduced by other cities.

4. Improvement of the Talent Introduction Policy of Islands

4.1 Hierarchical and Dynamic Adjustment of the Talent Introduction Policy

Objectively speaking, the talent introduction policies of China's islands are lagging behind, and will inevitably be at a short-term disadvantage in the competition for talent. Undoubtedly, the amount of excellent talent is limited within a certain period of time. Therefore, it is worth considering how to introduce more talent while reducing talent loss. As for the talent introduction of Pingtan, it is difficult to realize the initial expectation of Class-A talent because it has no advantage over any other city in terms of the preferential policy. Under this circumstance, Pingtan should concentrate on the two tasks of becoming an international tourist destination and developing its ecological environment. It should also focus on the introduction of Class-B talent through a more detailed hierarchical system to maximize the benefits of talent introduction.

4.1.1 Appropriate Innovation in Policy

It is stipulated in the *Procedures of Fujian Province on the Assessment of High-level Talent (Trial)*, a document that is the basis for Pingtan's talent introduction policy, that "all subregions and cities (districts) and provincial departments may introduce high-level talent as assessed and qualified in accordance with the *Procedures*, or formulate high-level talent assessment criteria for their respective major industries on the basis of the *Procedures* while considering local realities and development needs. Cities (or districts) including Sanming, Nanping, Longyan, Ningde and Pingtan and some major targets of the poverty alleviation program may apply relatively lower criteria which shall be implemented after the review and approval of the Fujian Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security and the Provincial Talent Management Office." Pingtan has lowered the standards for talent assessment, but it should do this to a greater extent. Moreover, there are additional opportunities for it to more effectively use the policy by integrating it with the tasks of becoming an international tourist destination and developing its ecological environment.

4.1.2 More Attention to the Realistic Needs for the Construction of 'Home Across the Strait'

Food, clothing, housing, transportation, education and healthcare are primary human needs, and thus the areas of attention for the construction of 'Home across the Strait'. However, Pingtan is far behind Taiwan in this regard due to its weak foundation. Pingtan even lacks an extensive amount of Taiwanese cuisine or snacks. Pingtan is also at the most basic stage of development in terms of clothing, housing, transportation, education, and healthcare. Although educational background is an important indicator for talent assessment, those with higher education diplomas can not necessarily meet realistic needs such as food. If we rely merely on policy support and ignore the basic needs of talent, we may be in opposition to our goals. It is suggested to pay more attention to the true meaning (measured in the contribution of talent and habitability) rather than the words (beautiful wording) of the policies.

4.1.3 More Detailed Criteria for Talent Classification

As mentioned above, at the current stage, Pingtan should focus on the introduction of Class-B talent, especially B2 and B3. The classification of talent is mainly based on academic qualification, professional title, and position. This naturally makes policymaking easier, but fails to consider the education system's internal diversification. China's education system has vastly improved due to many years of investment and development. For example, several Chinese universities and institutions have ranked among the top 200 universities in the world, or even among the top 100 in terms of their academic strength in certain research fields. The promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative will result in some areas, including Pingtan, becoming the main targets of globalization and internationalization. As an island city without many inherent advantages, Pingtan should focus its efforts on improving its degree of internationalization. Otherwise, it would be more difficult to make itself into an international tourist destination or a free trade zone. To this end, it is particularly important to introduce talent from the world's top 200 universities or those involved in a specific discipline with top-100 academic strength. These institutions are highly internationalized and have more opportunities for international exchanges. The talents from these institutions definitely have more world-class resources. This is a valuable resource for promoting local development, especially for its internationalization, and deserves more attention.

Some Chinese universities involved in the 'Double First-Class' initiative or Project 985 are among the world's top 200 universities, while some others, mainly those in Project 985, rank among the top 500. In the same way, talent should also be classified according to differences in their abilities, resources and personalities. Otherwise, the seemingly fair approach of evaluating talent using the same standard will ultimately be considered injustice. It will also result in the phenomenon of 'bad money drives out good', which must be avoided during talent introduction. In fact, the classification of talent according to the level of the universities from where they graduated is a common practice for talent introduction in China and can be used as a reference.

4.1.4 Organization-specific Talent Introduction Strategy

The employment of talent should be considered when making the talent introduction policy. It is necessary to formulate specific talent introduction policies for outstanding organizations or enterprises with relatively stable talent teams and large contributions to meet their needs. This will allow the talent introduced to fully integrate into the organization. Otherwise, the already inadequate human resources would be further reduced due to talent loss caused by belated and insufficient policy and environment support, thus resulting in higher human resource costs.

4.2 Emphasis on the Implementation and Result Evaluation of Talent Policy

Any policy must be implemented by people and ineffective implementation would result in talent loss. The amount of talent that will ultimately stay in Pingtan and contribute to long-term local development is the key to assessing the merit of a talent introduction policy.

Measures should be implemented to enhance the self-improvement of local talent and fully recognize the talent cultivated locally. This will prevent talent from being recruited or leaving as soon as they are well-trained or when subsidies are discontinued. In addition, a systematic evaluation of the results of talent-related policies, such as the amount of talent introduced and talent loss, as well as their contribution to local development and consumption, should be conducted as the basis for improving the current talent introduction policy. In addition, a joint meeting for talent introduction can be regularly organized to discuss and solve key problems in departmental coordination, talent introduction and employment.

5. Summary

Talent is the key to the sustainable development of islands. In the context of intensifying global competition, the most important part of talent policy of islands is to introduce and retain more talent. Only a group of talent willing to serve islands can really promote their sustainable development.

Acknowledgments

This research was financially supported by the project Sea Area's Ecology Protection Service and Policy-making Supporting (G2200204.190401) and Island Supervision and Management (G220004.180301).

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