



Migrating among GBA Cities: An Analysis of Predicaments of Human Mobility

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Abstract. The formal commencement of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area project (hereinafter referred to as GBA) was confirmed by signing the framework agreement on deepening the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau cooperation in the development of the GBA in 2017. The area including 9 cities in Guangdong and 2 Special Administrative Regions (hereinafter referred to as SAR) holds a strategic position in promoting the development of comprehensive opening up and practice of “one country, two systems”. Thus, it is significant to integrate the GBA cities and regions economically, socially, and culturally to achieve maximum benefit. This article pays close attention to the predicaments of human mobility within GBA. Firstly, the policies of encouraging human mobility from the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area will be introduced. Then predicaments of both SAR residents living in other Mainland GBA cities and mainland Chinese residents living in SAR cities will be discussed. Finally, two typical cases of application of subconcepts of place and community intervention approaches in the social work profession will be presented as good examples for promoting the development of GBA.

Keywords: Human mobility, GBA, predicaments, place, community intervention approaches.

1 Introduction

Led by the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area, the integration of nine cities in Guangdong province and two SARs aims to achieve maximum economic, social and cultural benefits. A significant human mobility has been witnessed under this outstanding project, with people moving from SARs to mainland GBA cities and vice versa. A great number of developmental opportunities emerged, while on the other hand, migrants sadly found themselves trapped in predicaments in incompatible social services and inconvenient living experiences (e.g. healthcare disparities, bank account and phone card incompatibility, social and cultural challenges). The unresolved predicaments will inevitably hinder

the implementation advancement of the GBA project. Some realistic and feasible measures must be discussed.

Through focusing on the experiences of both SAR residents living in other mainland GBA cities and mainland Chinese residents living in SAR cities, this article utilizes theoretical frameworks of subconcepts of place and case examples from Mao Sheng community in Zhuhai and Our HongKong Foundation that have identified sensible ways of social work service program and community interventions to mitigate the above predicaments, so as to understand the factors contributing to these predicament and to propose strategies for promoting better integration and development within the GBA.

2 Policies of Encouraging Human Mobility for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

According to the State Council (2019) [14], the development of GBA aims at facilitating the convenient and orderly flow of people, materials, capital, and information. Among the above four elements, human mobility takes the lead. Specifically, human mobility can be categorized in two ways. One way is people from Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR move to other GBA cities, and the other is people from Chinese Mainland GBA cities go to work or live in Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR. From the discourse of Zhu, et al. (2020) [17], the two ways of people mobility could be referred to as North-South and South-North migration patterns, because Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR have more developed economy than the GBA cities in the Chinese Mainland.

Strategic human mobility is promoted by macro-level factors that are related to economic and political elements. It had been listed clearly in the State Council (2019) [14] that the level of market interconnection needed to be further enhanced, and an efficient and convenient flow of production factors needed to be formed under the circumstances of "one country, two systems. Currently, Hong Kong's economic growth lacks sustained and solid support, Macau's economic structure is relatively homogeneous with limited development resources, and the market economy system of the nine cities in the Pearl River Delta needs to be improved. While on the other hand, the three regions have their respective advantages. As an international center in finance, shipping, and trade, and an international aviation hub, Hong Kong has a highly internationalized and legalized business environment and a worldwide business network. Macau's role as a world tourism and leisure center and a service platform for trade and commerce cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries continues to be strengthened. The nine cities of the Pearl River Delta are the most externally-oriented economic region in the Chinese Mainland and an important window for opening up to the outside world. Thus, it is significant to implement a coordinated regional development strategy and give full play to the comparative advantages of each region, promoting the effective docking of international and domestic markets and resources.

Motivated by this macro level of the grand strategic plan, a host of people start to move either from SAR regions to Canton GBA cities or vice versa for various reasons at the meso level or micro level. With a beautiful vision of migration life, certain obstacles inevitably come into reality.

3 Predicaments of Migrants within GBA

Due to different historical background, social and legal systems, people from the three regions have diverse lifestyles and perceptions even though they share the same ethnic origin and language. Consequently, the conflicts on ideology and local policies incompatibility push the lives of migrants in the three regions into predicaments.

3.1 SAR Migrants Living in the Chinese Mainland

According to the seventh national population census, 371,380 Hong Kong SAR residents and 55,732 Macao SAR residents live in the mainland, of whom 418,509 SAR migrants are from Guangdong province (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). [13] The statistics indicate that the largest proportion of SAR migrants is in the GBA area.

Apart from various concerns ranging from low salary to poor social networks, all of which have a certain impact on SAR residents' intention of migrating to other mainland GBA cities (Zhu et al., 2020) [17], SAR residents who have already stayed in mainland GBA cities are stuck in predicaments. There are some summarized obstacles to convenient life: (1) Bank account incompatibility makes laborious and unclear procedures plus high fees for withdrawal; (2) Phonocard incompatibility brings trouble for related services; (3) Healthcare incompatibility especially the medical care disparity increases the burden when getting sick; (4) Hong Kong youths are not familiar with mainland labor laws and regulations and lack livelihood support for employment in the Mainland; (5) Hong Kong elderly people are found homeless because they do not know how to use a smartphone for cross border application (Yan & He, 2023) [16].

Based on the reluctant intentions of migrating to mainland cities and the actual inconvenient living experiences. One report from Oliver Wyman (2022) [8] showed that most of its respondents would rather commute between Hong Kong and GBA cities in the Chinese Mainland than live there full time. Another study on the welfare portability of cross-border eldercare services (Cao & Fang, 2019) [2] found out the number of eligible recipients moving from the Mainland back to Hong Kong increased annually even if the scheme of cross-border eldercare services had been encouraged by a multitude of benefits plans. The reasons include factors like limitations on the types and support of portable allowances, nonscientific method of granting allowances, and inconvenient departure restrictions, among which the biggest obstacle is the non-portability of medical care.

3.2 Mainland Migrants Living in SAR Regions

Statistics from Census and Statistics Department (2021) [3] indicated more than 2 million Hong Kong residents are originally from Mainland, Macau, and Taiwan. Since the handover in 1997, about 250,000 "Hong Kong drifters" have migrated to Hong Kong through various entry schemes for Mainlanders, accounting for 17% of the 1.5 million Mainlanders who migrated to Hong Kong during the same period.

The development process of Hong Kong presents diversified attitudes towards mainland Chinese migrants. In contrast to a generally welcoming attitude in the 1960s, the following periods witnessed a gradually negative trend in the acceptance of mainland Chinese migrants (Lin et al., 2022) [7]. Affected by historical factors, current mainland migrants suffer from a certain extent of hostility or even discrimination. It has been concluded three main barriers to integrating into Hong Kong SAR, i.e., language, social platform, and culturally rooted perceptions.

As for mainland Chinese migrants living in Macau or commuting between Macau and adjacent cities, they are defined as non-resident workers. Based on the general principles of hiring non-resident workers in the present law (The Labor Affairs Bureau, Macao, 2009) [11], the aim of recruiting non-resident workers is to fill in the nonexistence or insufficiency of resident workers. Moreover, non-resident workers are required to give way to resident workers regarding employment. Among the total number of 122,354 non-resident workers from the Chinese Mainland, three sectors enjoy the highest number of mainland Chinese non-resident workers, i.e., hotel and restaurant, construction, and wholesale and retail trade (The Labor Affairs Bureau, Macao, 2019) [12].

It can be concluded from above that mainland Chinese migrants generally take jobs which are not favored by resident workers. Li et al. (2019) [6] revealed that mainland Chinese migrants in Macau undergo mental health problems owing to job stress, which results from high demands and limited resources. Job demands and border commuting fully occupy their daily life and make it impossible for them to explore and integrate into Macau. What's more, Ju & Sandel (2019) [4] summarized three types of perceived discrimination towards mainland Chinese migrants, which is related to job stealer, inferior job identity, and language disadvantage.

4 Theories Application in Social Work Profession

The predicament of migrant populations who suffer from adaption difficulty and exclusion by both policy and locals has long been a concern for social workers. In the history of the profession, social workers not only fight against unjust policy restrictions but also spare no effort in facilitating integration which is consistent with social work core values (Kiehne & Androff, 2021 [5]; Timor-Shlevin, 2023 [15]).

4.1 The Subconcepts of Place for Migrants in GBA Cities

Considering the relationship between people and the environment, Akesson et al. (2017) [1] demonstrated three subconcepts of place, namely place attachment, place

identity, and territoriality. The illustrations of integrating these concepts into social work to better understand and help marginalized populations shed light on improving the situation of migrants in GBA cities.

In 2021, Mao Sheng Community in the city of Zhuhai was selected as the pilot site of the social work service program due to its location next to Macau SAR and the number of Hong Kong and Macau SAR residents accounting for one-third of the total number of community residents. The program promoted to set up supportive community-based social organizations and groups with various themes to encourage the participation of community residents. At the same time, communication was operated in the forms of training and seminar to better explore effective integration mechanisms. The program highlighted creating the first charitable community as the GBA's uniqueness. In the meanwhile, it strived for building up a brand of charitable community that could be learned and promoted.

Under the integration policy of GBA development, social work services in the Mao Sheng community give a typically good example for integrating concepts of place into the lived experience of SAR migrants. By active participation in community-based governance, Hong Kong and Macau SAR migrants work hand in hand with mainland residents, building up their place worthwhile attachment and a psychological bridge to their hometowns which strengthens the place of identity.

4.2 Community Intervention Approaches for Migrants in GBA Cities

For the improved community intervention approaches, three basic strategies were proposed by Rothman (2007) [10]. Planning and Policy Practice, Community Capacity Development, and Social Advocacy. By interlocking the above three basic strategies, nine intervention modes with respective focuses had been put forward.

A survey conducted by Our Hong Kong Foundation (2022) [9] released data on talent flow under the operation of the GBA national strategy. The survey interviewed 2500 Hong Kong residents who lived or worked in the GBA and 3,012 highly-educated mainlanders currently living in Hong Kong. The results showed that 60% of mainland respondents in Hong Kong did not intend to stay more than five years. As for Hong Kong residents living in the Mainland, more than 67% of respondents were dissatisfied or neutral with mainland healthcare services.

According to the survey data which revealed obstacles to improving the integration of GBA cities, some policy directions had been proposed. For mainland residents living in Hong Kong, the first proposition was an appeal to Hong Kong SAR Government to review talent attraction and retention policies, then followed by improving living conditions and organizing free cultural exchange activities. On the other hand, suggestions from the perspectives of theme-based exchange programs, cross-border medical services facilitation, and association support had been raised to help Hong Kong residents living in Mainland integrate into the cities.

As a non-government, and non-profit organization, Our Hong Kong Foundation adopted the community intervention mode of Policy Advocacy which is a combination of policy planning and social advocacy, to support better development of GBA.

5 Conclusion

Under the grand construction goal of promising GBA, the effectiveness of talent flow plays a significant role. Facing all types of obstacles from both so-called North to South and South to North migration, the social work service program of Mao Sheng Community and the survey from Our Hong Kong Foundation are typically successful examples of application of theories and methods like subconcepts of place and community intervention approaches, which should be promoted and learned by other communities and organizations, in the hope of working out constructive strategies and building up feasible programs for integration of GBA.

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