Chapter 6
Examining Adjustment Challenges of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine major adjustment challenges facing mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. Even though a large amount of studies have been carried out to understand adjustment issues of mainland Chinese students studying overseas, few are with students in Hong Kong. This study aims to deepen our understanding of the major adjustment issues of this particular group. The current study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods and included over 300 mainland Chinese students studying in seven major government-funded universities. The findings of this study point to the need that individual tertiary institutions and the Hong Kong government should step up their effort in responding sufficiently and flexibly in meeting the critical needs of these mainland Chinese students by paying additional attention to the quality and accessibility of both education-related services and non-education factors.

INTRODUCTION

The number of international students worldwide has grown significantly in the past two decades. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there were fewer than 1.4 million international students worldwide in 1995, but the number increased to approximately 3.5 million in 2009 (OECD, 2012). It has been estimated that the number of international students studying outside their home country may reach 8 million by 2025 (Bhandari, 2009). Among all countries, China remains the leading sending country for international students. In 2008, over 380,000 mainland Chinese students were studying abroad for degrees at overseas universities (Institute of International Education, 2009). It is predicted that the number of mainland Chinese students overseas will increase to 645,000 by 2028

(Maslen, 2007). The United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany are the top five popular study destinations among mainland Chinese students (Institute of International Education, 2009). According to Rahul Choudaha, associate director of the New York-based World Education Services, the high demand among Chinese to study overseas is driven by "a shortage of places on high-quality degree courses at home and the pressure to have an overseas qualification when chasing jobs" (Coughlan, 2011).

In the past decade, Hong Kong has also become increasingly popular among mainland Chinese students (Hung, Shive, Wang, & Diu, 2005; Li & Bray, 2006). According to the latest statistics from the Hong Kong government, there are currently over 10,000 non-local students studying in Hong Kong (University Grants Committee, 2012). As indicated in Table 1, the majority of these non-local students (90%) are from mainland China.

Like many other countries, higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Hong Kong have been stepping up efforts in recruiting international students in recent years (Cheung, Yuen, & Yuen, 2008). In 2002, the Hong Kong government published a report on Hong Kong higher education in which it proposed that Hong Kong possessed the capacity to export higher education services and become an education hub in the region. Again, in 2007, the Hong Kong government released its Action Agenda on China's 11th Five-Year Plan and the Development of Hong Kong, recommending the exploration of ways to attract more non-local students to study in Hong Kong and to develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub (The

Hong Kong Government, 2007). As shown in Figure 1, the number of non-local students in Hong Kong has increased by almost fivefold from 1997 to 2010, jumping from 2,253 to 10074 (University Grants Committee, 2012).

Although Hong Kong is seeking more international students from countries other than China to diversify the student population in the tertiary sector, mainland China will continue to be the largest contributing country in Hong Kong higher education in the foreseeable future (University Grant Committee, 2010). Previous research suggests that non-local students often encounter more adjustment problems and have less access to resources for coping with these challenges than their local counterparts due to language and cultural difference (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Perdersen, 1975). Although Hong Kong and China bear great similarities in terms of their cultures and languages, there are still a great deal of differences between these two places, which could cause substantial adjustment challenges for mainland Chinese students during their "sojourner" stay in Hong Kong (Tsang, 2001). Most of the current research is limited to mainland Chinese students studying in Western countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Few studies to date examine adjustment problems of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong. There is a need, therefore, to deepen our understanding of the major adjustment issues experienced by these mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong. It is hoped that the findings and discussion in this paper will

Table 1. Non-local student enrollment, 2000-2010

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Non-Local (Total)	1781	2253	2604	3204	3728	4773	6217	7293	8392	9333	10074
Mainland China	1463	1911	2230	2849	3362	4370	5754	6751	7713	8429	8724
Other Countires	318	342	374	355	366	403	463	542	679	904	1350

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