

A Study of Low-Income Mainland-Hong Kong Cross-Border Families

Research Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Title: A Study of Low-Income Mainland-Hong Kong Cross-Border Families

Reference No.: R-20 17/18-106r

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Objectives:

- (1) To explore the everyday challenges of low-income Mainland parent(s) and their children in Hong Kong;
- (2) To understand the education opportunities of low-income Hong Kong-born Mainland children in Hong Kong; and
- (3) To inform government policies relating to impoverished Mainland parents and their children

Method

Data are drawn from home visits and in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. Twenty-eight undergraduate and postgraduate student researchers were recruited to conduct monthly home visits, under the supervision of the PI and Co-Is, to 28 low-income Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families. From January to May, 2018, five home visits to each family and one in-depth semi-structured pair-interview (parent and the child) per family were conducted. With the consent of informants, interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed for analysis using the constant comparative method.

Key Findings

Reasons for Giving Birth and Staying in Hong Kong

1. For various reasons, parents gave birth in Hong Kong to evade China's one-child policy. One common reason was that the traditional Chinese patriarchal norms in the Mainland produced pressures from in-laws, husband, or even the mother herself to have at least one son. Another reason was unintended pregnancy.
2. Parents received inaccurate information about Hong Kong's migration and education policies, leading them to underestimate the challenges they would face in Hong Kong.

Regarding Challenges Facing Parents

1. Cross-border families are most challenged in areas of income, housing, school place for children, visa, family separation, and social support.
2. They feel they are excluded from any government social provision in Hong Kong.
3. Their sense of belonging to Hong Kong is discouraged by the difficult livelihood and the general negative social ethos in Hong Kong against Mainlanders.

Regarding Educational Opportunities of their Children

1. Parents feel they can offer little support for their children partly because of their lack of knowledge on the local educational system and partly because of their low education level.
2. They also report that their children are sometimes excluded from social support because of their lack of permanent resident status.
3. In many cases, tensions between parents and children build up as children's academic performance does not meet the parents' expectations, and parents are not able to provide schoolwork assistance.

Policy Suggestions

Access to Social Services and Resources

We suggest that the Government and other social service providers should revisit their related policies to make sure no eligible children are denied access to resources on grounds of the residency status of their parents.

Social Security

We suggest reverting the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme application to the pre-2008 policy to allow Hong Kong-born Mainland children under the age of 18 to apply on an individual basis.

Visa and Period of Stay

We suggest that the "One-year Multiple Entry Permit" should cover all cross-border parents who need to stay and take care of their children in Hong Kong, regardless whether their spouses are Hong Kong permanent residents or not.

Household Registration (Hukou)

We suggest implementing a proper mechanism for parents to voluntarily exchange their children's Hong Kong permanent resident status with Mainland hukou.

Special Employment Permission

We suggest that the Hong Kong government should consider granting conditional temporary work permission to parents of low-income cross-border families.

Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Elimination of Discrimination

We suggest that the Government should conduct comprehensive public consultation and research on discrimination on grounds of residency status to address the discrimination widely experienced by cross-border families.

行政摘要

項目名稱：關注低收入中港跨境家庭研究

參考編號： R-20 17/18-106r

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目的：

- (1) 探討低收入內地父母及其子女在香港所面對的挑戰；
- (2) 了解在香港出生、來自低收入家庭的內地兒童在香港的教育機會；和
- (3) 就貧困內地父母及其在港出生子女的政策，向政府提供建議。

研究方法

研究資料來自家訪和半結構式深入訪談。本計劃招募了 28 名本科生和研究生研究人員，在首席研究員和合作研究員的指導下，研究員每月到 28 個低收入中港跨境家庭進行家訪。從 2018 年 1 月到 5 月，與每個家庭進行了五次家訪及一次深入的半結構式雙人訪談（父母和孩子）。在訪談對象同意下，訪談以錄音方式記錄，並將訪談內容謄寫，以持續比較法分析。

主要研究成果

在香港生育和居留的原因

1. 出於各種原因，母親在香港分娩以繞過中國的一孩政策。一個常見的原因，是中國傳統重男輕女的固有思想，為母親帶來壓力，認為非生男孩子不可。另一個原因是意外懷孕。
2. 家長收到有關香港移民和教育政策的信息，往往其實不準確，導致他們低估了在香港要面臨的挑戰。

父母面對的挑戰

1. 跨境家庭在收入、住屋、兒童學位、簽證、家庭分離和社會支援方面的挑戰最為嚴峻。
2. 他們覺得自己被排除在香港政府的社會服務之外。
3. 艱難的生活與及香港人對內地人普遍負面的觀感，阻礙跨境父母及其在港出生子女對香港的歸屬感。

子女的教育機會

1. 父母認為他們自己對孩子的協助很少，部分原因是他們對本地教育制度缺乏了解，部分原因是他們的教育水平偏低。
2. 他們亦指出，由於他們自己沒有香港永久居民身份，所以其在港出生子女有時被排除在社會支援服務之外。
3. 在許多情況下，子女的學業成績不符父母的期望，父母又無法提供學業上的支援，父母和子女之間的關係會變得更緊張。

政策建議

社會服務和資源

我們建議政府和其他社會服務提供者應重新審視其相關政策，以確保符合資格的兒童，不會因其父母的居住身份而無法獲得資源。

社會保障

我們建議將綜合社會保障援助（綜援）計劃的申請回復至 2008 年前的政策，容許 18 歲以下、內地人在香港出生的子女以個人身分申請綜援。

簽證和逗留期限

我們建議「一年多次入境許可證」應涵蓋所有需要在香港逗留照顧子女的跨境父母，不論其配偶是否香港永久性居民。

戶口

我們建議實施適當的機制，讓家長自願以子女的香港永久性居民身份換回內地戶口。

特殊就業許可

我們建議香港政府考慮給予低收入跨境家庭的父母有條件的工作許可。

促進平等機會和消除歧視

我們建議政府就居留身份免受歧視的保障，廣泛進行公眾諮詢和研究，以應對跨境家庭廣泛地遭受的歧視。

ABSTRACT

1. The mass media often stereotypes Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families as “affluent but voracious” settlers plundering local resources – they battle with local families for school places in the North District, gatecrash the city’s emergency and maternity wards to give birth, and push up property prices. However, this generalization of cross-border families only tells part of the reality. There are also children born to impoverished Mainland parents in Hong Kong, who are often neglected by the public. With no wealth, no *hukou* (household registration) in China, no social network in Hong Kong, how do these widely ignored families and children live in the margin of Hong Kong and Mainland China? What are their challenges and opportunities? How do their experiences inform government policies?
2. This project seeks to delve into the everyday lives of cross-border families, the obstacles they encounter in livelihood and at work and schools, and the conflicts and tension in relation to their identities as citizens of Hong Kong. Data are drawn from home visits and semi-structured individual interviews. Twenty-eight student researchers were recruited to conduct monthly home visits, under the supervision of the PI and Co-Is, to 28 Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families. From January to May, 2018, the team conducted five home visits to each family and 28 in-depth semi-structured pair-interviews (parent and the child).
3. Findings reveal that Mainland parents were driven by various social, cultural and financial factors to give birth in Hong Kong. Low-income cross-border families in Hong Kong are challenged not only by economic hardship but also social and institutional exclusions. The children’s educational opportunities are sometimes compromised because of the precarious migration status of their parents. Based on the findings, we suggest policy interventions in six areas – access to social services and resources, social security, traveler visa and period of stay, household registration, special employment permission, promotion of equal opportunities and elimination of discrimination – in order to enhance the life opportunities of these children.

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Two incidents in the early post-1997 handover period paved the way for the emergence of the cross-border family phenomenon in Hong Kong. One was the Chong Fung Yuen Case in 2001 and the other was the Individual Visit Scheme launched in 2003 under the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA).
- 1.2 The Chong Fung Yuen Case was a court case of judicial review on the immigration policy on the entitlement of the right of abode of Hong Kong-born Chinese nationals whose parents are not Hong Kong permanent residents. Article 24 of the Basic Law states that “Chinese citizens born in Hong Kong before or after the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region” are Hong Kong Permanent Residents and therefore hold the right of abode in Hong Kong (HKSAR Government, 2012). However, the Immigration Ordinance at that time restricted the right of abode to those whose “father or mother was settled or had the right of abode in Hong Kong at the time of the birth of the person or at any later time” (Chen, 2011).
- 1.3 Chong was born in 1997 in Hong Kong to Mainland Chinese parents during their temporary visit to Chong’s grandfather living in Hong Kong. Chong’s parents left Chong to his grandparents’ care in Hong Kong and went back to Mainland China in the same year. Chong’s stay was deemed illegal by the Immigration Department. In 1999, the Immigrant Department warned to repatriate Chong. Chong’s grandfather filed a judicial review on the Immigration Ordinance. In 2001, the Court of Final Appeal ruled in favor of Chong that he had the right of abode, and consequently legally granted Chinese nationals born in Hong Kong the right of abode regardless of the Hong Kong immigration status of their parents (Wenweipo, 2008).
- 1.4 While the Chong Fung Yuen Case provided the legal basis for the later cross-border family phenomenon, the implementation of the Individual Visit Scheme opened up a channel for Mainland women to give birth in Hong Kong. In 2003, following the economic depression brought by the SARS epidemic, CEPA was enacted with an aim to boost cross-border trade and tourism. Before the implementation of CEPA, Mainland tourists could only visit Hong Kong with official tour groups. However, as the Individual Visit Scheme was launched as part of CEPA, Mainland tourists could visit Hong Kong on an individual basis. Birth tourism became one of the important by-products of CEPA, which later aroused public concern and ignited anti-mainland sentiment (So, 2017). From 2003 to 2012, the number of babies born to Mainland women whose spouses were not

Hong Kong permanent residents skyrocketed from 2,070 to 26,715. After the government prohibited Mainland women from giving birth in Hong Kong since 2013, the number reduced to 790 in the same year (Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children, 2017).

1.5 While the first wave of tourism birth witnessed Mainland mothers from middle class backgrounds, the later wave saw families from working-class and rural origins. Low-income cross-border families are usually financially and socially vulnerable as they are excluded from the migration and welfare policies on either side of the border (Chee, 2017).

1.6 The mass media often stereotypes Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families as ‘affluent but voracious’ settlers plundering local resources – they battle with local families for school places in the North District, gatecrash the city’s emergency and maternity wards to give birth, and push up property prices. However, this generalization of cross-border families only tells part of the reality. There are also children born to impoverished mainland parent(s) in Hong Kong, who are no better than local poor people, and who are often, neglected by the public.

1.7 This project seeks to delve into the everyday lives of cross-border families in order to understand the obstacles they encounter in livelihood, and the tensions in relation to their identities as citizens of Hong Kong. Consequently, this research project aims to address three objectives and three research questions:

Objectives:

- (1) To explore the lived experiences and socio-economic needs of low-income mainland parent(s) and their children in Hong Kong
- (2) To understand the academic trajectories and identity construction of low-income Hong Kong-born mainland children
- (3) To inform government policies relating to impoverished mainland parent(s) and their children

Research Questions:

- What difficulties do the cross-border families encounter, and in what ways do they attempt to and/or able to resolve the difficulties?

- How do the cross-border families make sense of their cultural identity?
- What are the implications for the promotion of equal opportunities and elimination of discrimination in Hong Kong?

CHAPTER 2 METHOD

2.1 Data of this project were collected through monthly home visits and in-depth semi-structured interviews of 28 low-income Mainland-Hong Kong cross-border families. All the children in this project were born in Hong Kong between 2003 and 2012, and are currently living and going to school in Hong Kong. For each family, typically one parent stays in Hong Kong on tourist visa to take care of the child.

2.2 *Research Team*

The research team consists of Dr. Chee Wai-chi as PI, Mr. Chu Kong Wai and Mr. Ip Ping Lam as Co-Is, and 28 student researchers. The student researchers were recruited through an open call in October 2017 to three universities: Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and The University of Hong Kong (HKU). Thirty-seven applications were received and applicants were invited to attend two training workshops in November 2017. Twenty-eight student researchers (Table 1) who successfully completed the training workshops were accepted to the research team.

Table 2.1 Academic background of student researchers

	HKBU	CUHK	HKU	Total
Associate Degree student	1	0	0	1
Undergraduate students	3	4	3	10
Postgraduate students	8	9	0	17
Total	12	13	3	28

2.3 *Cross-Border Families*

Twenty-eight cross-border families were recruited by snowball sampling through existing networks of PI and Co-Is, which had been established through their long-term engagement with cross-border families. This group of families consists of 26 mothers, one grandmother, one father and 40 children. Selection was based on two criteria: (1) the parents are non-Hong Kong citizens; and they stay in Hong Kong on temporary tourist visas to take care of their Hong Kong-born children who go to schools in Hong Kong; and (2) before intervention, the household is living below or near the official poverty line, which is drawn at half of the median monthly household income according to household size. In 2016, the poverty line was HK\$4,000 for a single person, HK\$9,000 for a two-person household and HK\$15,000 for three people.

2.4 Training Workshops and Monthly Meetings

Before the project started, all student researchers were required to successfully complete two training workshops in November 2017. Workshop 1 was on the background information of the research, the migration policies of Hong Kong and Mainland China, and other related policies and measures. Workshop 2 was on research skills, research ethics and the logistics. For each workshop, there were 2 sessions which were identical. Student researchers were required to attend one session for each workshop.

During the course of the project, from January to May 2018, the whole research team met in the afternoon of the last Saturday of each month to share experience, reflected on the previous home visit and prepared for the coming home visit. In the last meeting, student researchers reflected on their experiences in participating in this project and made suggestions.

2.5 Home Visits and In-depth Interviews

From January to May 2018, each team of 2 student researchers visited 2 families monthly. All teams were accompanied by PI/Co-I in their first visit, while other visits were occasionally attended by PI/Co-I. Student researchers focused on the following tasks:

1st Visit (January)

- Student researchers introduce themselves and explain their role in project
- State each other's expectations
- Sign informed consent form
- Get to know each other (non-sensitive background information)
- Observe the living conditions of family
- Schedule a time for next visit (do the same for every visit)

2nd Visit (February)

- Chat casually with the child(ren) about everyday school experiences
- Observe interactions between parent and child(ren)

3rd Visit (March)

- Chat casually with the parent on everyday experiences and trajectories of giving birth in Hong Kong

4th Visit (April)

- Semi-structured interviews with parent and child together (Revise the questions based on the data collected in the previous visits) (See Appendix I)

- Get their consent to tape record the interview (if consent is not granted, take notes); explain again how the information collected will be handled and used

5th Visit (May)

- Ask follow-up questions
- Talk about modes of future connections (leaving the field)

After each home visit, student researchers write fieldnotes. After the semi-structured interviews, student researchers transcribe and then code the interviews. The PI and Co-Is read and analyze the fieldnotes and interview transcripts. The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was used to identify categories and make connections between categories.

2.6 *Whole group social gathering*

On 2nd June 2018 (Saturday), a gathering was organized for all the research team members and families in this research for evaluation, further relationship building and mutual exchange. It also served as an opportunity to hear feedback from the families.

CHAPTER 3 CHARACTERISTICS OF LOW-INCOME CROSS-BORDER FAMILIES

3.1 A typical low-income cross border family composes of a parent and one to two children born in Hong Kong. It is often a single-parent family, with a mother in her 30s to early 50s taking care of children studying in kindergarten or primary school. The mother stays in Hong Kong upon a one-way permit, which must be renewed regularly. Even when it is not a single-parent family, parents are separated as the father works in the Mainland and, in some cases, takes care of their Mainland-born elder children. The parent and child in Hong Kong live in a subdivided flat in low-income areas such as Mong Kok, Sham Shui Po, Tsuen Wan, and Kwai Tsing, with poor housing condition but high unit rental rate (usually no less than \$3000 per month for a tiny room). Since the mother is not eligible to work in Hong Kong, the family does not have stable income, and has to rely on church's or NGO's supports (usually in the form of occasional food supply) for subsistence. They might or might not be receiving CSSA, but even if they are, the subsidy only covers basic subsistence of children, but not the mother.

Table 3.1 summarizes the characteristics of families interviewed in this project. Of the 28 families, 16 are single-parent family. Eighteen families have one child born and residing in Hong Kong, eight families have two, and the remaining have three. All families but one live in subdivided housing. Twenty-two parents renew their visa once every three months, while others renew their visa once every year. Fourteen families receive CSSA during the period of the research. Twenty-two families rely on supports from churches, NGOs, and / or food bank as their important sources of subsistence (See Appendix II for profiles of individual families).

Table 3.1 Characteristics of cross-border families in this project

Family Size in HK	
2	68.0%
3	25.0%
4	3.5%
5	3.5%
No. of Children in HK	
1	64.3%
2	28.6%
3	7.1%

Single-parent Family

Yes	57.1%
No	42.9%

Housing Type

Sub-Divided Flat	96.4%
Public Housing	3.6%

CSSA Recipient

Yes	50.0%
No	50.0%

Parent's Visa Type

Three-month multiple-entry	78.6%
One-year multiple-entry	21.4%

CHAPTER 4 KEY FINDINGS

4.1 *Reasons for Giving Birth and Staying in Hong Kong*

Mainland parents did not know much about Hong Kong prior to making the decision to give birth in Hong Kong. Some of them had never visited Hong Kong, while most of them only had a few tourist visits before. They had a generally positive impression of Hong Kong – cosmopolitan, freedom, and opportunities. As an interviewee said, “That was what I thought: Hong Kong is very prosperous and full of opportunities. As long as you are willing to work hard, you can create opportunities for yourself. That was my impression of Hong Kong” (Ms Yeung, aged 38).

For various reasons, they were motivated to give birth in Hong Kong in order to evade China’s one-child policy. One common reason was that the traditional Chinese patriarchal norms in the Mainland produced pressures from in-laws, husband, or even the mother herself to have at least one son. Parents whose first child was a daughter might hope to have a son but the one-child policy prohibited them from further giving birth on the Mainland. Informants commonly reported forceful enforcement of the policy by the National Population and Family Planning Commission, such as involuntary sterilization surgery. Another reason was that the pregnancy was unintended and parents were unprepared.

Parents often received inaccurate information about Hong Kong’s migration and education policies, leading them to underestimate the challenges they would face in Hong Kong. Such inaccurate information generally came from neighbors, relatives, and birth-tourism agencies in Mainland China.

Mainland parents usually brought their children back to the Mainland after giving birth in Hong Kong. They lived in the Mainland until realizing that without a *hukou*, the child with only Hong Kong citizenship could not receive free public education or enjoy other social benefits in the Mainland. Since most of the parents came from rural areas, they could not afford to pay the so-called “sponsorship fee” (贊助費) as required by schools in Mainland for admission of students without a local *hukou*. “Sponsorship fee” was usually around ¥200,000 for Hong Kong-born students, which was way beyond the financial capacity of low-income families, especially when they had already spent most of their savings on giving birth in Hong Kong.

Since Hong Kong’s education is highly subsidized, and usually perceived to be better than

Mainland China, the Mainland parents decided to split the family up in order to let their Hong Kong-born children receive education in Hong Kong. The father and elder children stay in the Mainland, while the mother stays in Hong Kong to take care of the Hong Kong-born child. The mother and child would rent a subdivided flat and apply for admission to a kindergarten near their new home.

A mother explained her choice to let her child study in Hong Kong:

I believe Hong Kong's education is good. Like my auntie... she has two sons. One son studied in mainland China until secondary school when he came to Hong Kong. But he couldn't catch up... and turned like a gangster. His school results were bad and he never worked hard. The other son was born and raised in Hong Kong. He always studied well. He went abroad to further his education just last year. It is better to study in Hong Kong... He could even go overseas. Either my auntie nor her husband is well-educated. They do not teach him. It is only because the education here is better (Ms Sheung, aged 41).

4.2 Economic Predicament and Extreme Poverty

The cross-border families interviewed in this project face extreme poverty. Since the parents are not Hong Kong citizens and thus not eligible to work in Hong Kong, most of the families do not have a stable income. Working in Mainland China is out of the question because most of them have no relatives or friends to offer childcare and affordable public childcare service is largely absent in Hong Kong. This is especially difficult for single-parent families.

Families rely on three main sources of subsistence. The first source is husband's income on the Mainland. This, however, is rare amongst the families in this project. In the case of divorcee, it is common that the ex-husband refuses to pay alimony. Other families usually have the fathers working in precarious, low-paid, and unskilled jobs on the Mainland. The husband's income is highly unstable and barely sufficient to support the family staying on the Mainland (i.e. the family with husband and elder children born in Mainland China), let alone supporting the family in Hong Kong.

The second source is Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). For reasons to be mentioned in the next sub-section, many families in our project are not eligible to apply for CSSA. For those families which have been granted conditional CSSA, only basic subsistence of the child(ren) but not the mother is covered. In other words, CSSA only provides them with no more than \$4000 per month (for a family with one child). In many cases, they have to pay no less than \$3000 per month for rent. Rent has already

eaten up the bulk of CSSA.

The third source is food assistance from churches, NGOs, and food bank. This type of assistance, however, is occasional and unhealthy. Families receive mostly canned and packaged food (such as instant noodle) from these organizations on an irregular basis. No fresh vegetable or meat would be delivered regularly. Most of the food is nearly expired food donated by the private sector. This is not healthy for the development of children.

4.3 *Social and Institutional Exclusions*

Despite being Hong Kong permanent residents, children of cross-border families are generally not protected by the CSSA Scheme. This is because CSSA is a family-based welfare policy, meaning that family members living together must apply for the scheme as a family unit, and that all family members in this unit must be Hong Kong residents. Since children of cross-border families are living with their non-permanent resident Mainland parents (mainly mothers), their families fail to meet the basic requirements of CSSA application.

The Director of Social Welfare Department has the authority to exercise his/her discretion to grant CSSA (either conditionally or unconditionally) to persons who do not satisfy the basic requirements. In fact, before 2008, the Social Welfare Department would adopt the same practice of dealing with local orphans to handle cases of cross-border families. The Social Welfare Department would assign a person (such as registered social worker) to be the custodian of cross-border children in order to help them to apply for CSSA and to manage the distribution of the grant. Since 2008, however, the Social Welfare Department stopped this practice. Instead, it requires every applicant whose parents are not Hong Kong citizens to apply for CSSA as member of a local family unit. In practice, this means that in order to apply for CSSA, now children of cross-border families must find, join, and be counted as a member of a local family (also known as the “guardian family”) which is already receiving CSSA (Post 852, 2015).

Informants of our research reported that the guardian policy (i.e. the post-2008 policy) created serious predicaments facing parents (especially mothers) and children of cross-border families. First, from the very beginning, it is very hard for Mainland parents to find a “guardian” or “guardian family” because these mothers usually have no friends or relatives in Hong Kong. Even if they do, these friends or relatives are usually not CSSA recipients. Sometimes the mothers would seek help from their local neighbors who are CSSA recipients, but very often these neighbors would only help upon some special conditions — for instance, the neighbors would request gifts, red-pockets, cashes, unpaid

housework, or even sex from Mainland mothers. Indeed, there are cases of our informants reporting that they faced verbal and physical sexual harassment when they asked their neighbor to be the guardian of their children. Informants also reported that when they were able to get a guardian and approached the Social Welfare Department, some frontline staff of the Department would discourage the neighbor from being the guardian of children.

Even after the mothers and children are granted CSSA, there are still other problems. One problem is that children under the post-2008 policy get less amount of money than they could get when compared to the pre-2008 policy. Since CSSA is family based, the average share of an individual family member will be less when the family size is bigger. For instance, the amount of money each individual of a family with two or more members can get is less than the amount a single-person family can get. Under the post-2008 policy, as the children are counted as members of a local CSSA family, the amount of money the children can get is less than the amount they could get under the pre-2008 policy. The original members of the family would also receive less than what they could get before adding cross-border children into their family. The guardian therefore demands that the compensation should be taken from the children's share. The sum of CSSA received by the children is further reduced.

Moreover, under the post-2008 policy, no separate official notice is given to cross-border children and mothers on the exact amount of money they can get. All grants are transferred to the guardian's bank account, and cross-border families get cash from the guardian. Guardians would only be verbally informed by the Social Welfare Department or social workers how much they should give to Mainland mothers and their children. This leads to problems such as delayed or insufficient payment and hence conflicts between cross-border families and guardian families.

4.4 *Educational Opportunities of Children*

Parents feel they can offer little support for their children partly because of their lack of knowledge on the local educational system and partly because of their low education level. As an interviewee said, "I worry about my child's learning. I can't teach him... can't really help him. I went to school only until Junior Secondary" (Ms Lau, aged 32).

They also report that their children are sometimes excluded from social support because of their lack of permanent resident status. For instance, some government- or NGO-sponsored extracurricular activities require HKID of parents or guardians.

Another mother shared an experience of being excluded from an activity:

My son and I once registered for an excursion for parent and child organized by a community center. But later a social worker called me and said, 'Sorry. We need your ID to take out an insurance. It is an outdoor activity. You don't have an ID. So your son can't go either.' Although we understood, we were still disappointed (Ms Sung, aged 35).

Another everyday example is the application of a public library card. Applicants under the age of 18 must produce an adult resident of Hong Kong to be his guarantor who is responsible for all the liabilities. Children's applications are denied on the ground that their parents do not have a HKID.

In many cases, tensions between parents and children build up as children's academic performance does not meet the parents' expectations, and parents are not able to provide schoolwork assistance. Parents hope very much to have free or affordable tutorial groups. Families with children with special educational needs (SEN) are particularly in need of help.

An interviewee reflected:

I feel that I owe my kid. Other kids can have tutorials. His kindergarten provides English tutorials for an extra fee of HK\$900 per term. But we can't afford it... I feel ashamed of myself. Other children have this, but he doesn't. From 3:30-4:00pm, those students who pay have an expatriate teacher to teach them English. A few students, including my son, who cannot pay for it just play on their own.... Many children of my son's age know how to swim, but my son doesn't... because I can't afford the fee of HK50 per class. I don't know how to swim and can't teach him... So my son may lag behind academically or in other life skills too (Ms Fu, aged 40).

4.5 Sense of Belonging

Parents' sense of belonging to Hong Kong is discouraged by the difficult livelihood and the general negative social ethos in Hong Kong against Mainlanders. They try not to disclose their status to other people, like the parents of their children's classmates for fear of inviting discrimination.

A mother related:

Only a few very close friends in the Church know my situation. I don't tell others I'm from the mainland. You hear every day from the mass media that 'mainlanders snatch our things... our baby formula... our school places etc.' I am not sure what

other people think if they know I'm from China. I won't tell them (Ms Ho/Ko, aged 31).

Another mother said:

It was okay before they (other parents) knew I have no document (HKID). We talked to each other. But their attitudes changed when they know I have no documents. Like last time... they were talking and I went over wanting to join them, but they avoided me. I know some of them look down on me (Ms Tam, aged 37).

CHAPTER 5 POLICY SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Resources and a stable and supportive family are important conditions of children's development. The current research project, however, found that children of low-income cross-border families in Hong Kong lack both. They are challenged by poverty because their parents, who are not Hong Kong citizens and rely on temporary traveler visa to visit Hong Kong and take care of their children, are not allowed to engage in paid employment in Hong Kong, and are excluded from social security and social services provided by the government and NGOs. Cross-border families are thus institutionally excluded from many social resources. Moreover, cross-border parents must constantly go back to their hometowns of *hukou* in order to renew their temporary traveler visas. Since most of these families do not have friends or relatives in Hong Kong, and affordable public childcare services are not readily available, Mainland parents have no choice but to move back and forth between Hong Kong and the Mainland along with their children. This renders serious and continual disruptions to children's schooling and learning process.

The present section suggests policy interventions in four areas – access to social services and resources, social security, traveler visa and period of stay, household registration, special employment permission, and promotion of equal opportunities and elimination of discrimination – in order to enhance the life opportunities of these children.

5.2 Access to Social Services and Resources

Assessment of provision of social services and resources should be based entirely on the eligibility and needs of the applicant. For applicants who are under 18, there should be no differential treatment on grounds of their parents' residency status. In other words, there should be no unfavorable treatment of Hong Kong-born children to Mainland parents for eligibility for public services and resources.

5.3 Social Security

As noted above, the current practice of CSSA (i.e. the post-2008 policy) produces discrimination against cross-border families. It sets up unreasonable threshold for children with Hong Kong citizenship to exercise their basic social rights in Hong Kong and to meet their basic subsistence needs. It also induces conflicts between cross-border families and local families. More importantly, it institutionally places the mothers and children in a vulnerable position. The post-2008 policy, therefore, is an undesirable one for any society which respects basic human rights, equal opportunities, and dignity of women. Hence, we suggest reverting to the pre-2008 CSSA policy.

5.4 Visa and Period of Stay

Cross-border parents usually apply for the family-reunion two-way-permit to visit Hong Kong, which allows them to stay for no more than 90 days. Due to lack of affordable public childcare service and social networks in Hong Kong, cross-border parents have no choice but to bring along their children back to the Mainland when they renew their visa. The renewal process usually takes one to two weeks. This leads to serious disruption of children's learning process when children sometimes have to travel to Mainland China for at least a week in the middle of a school semester.

Since 2009, the Chinese government implemented the "family reunion two-way-permit of multi-entries per year" (also known as "One-year Multiple Entry Permit"), which allows Mainland Chinese with Hong Kong spouses to enter Hong Kong multiple times within a year (Security Bureau, 2010). However, cross-border parents whose spouses are not Hong Kong permanent residents are excluded from this scheme.

We suggest that the "One-year Multiple Entry Permit" should cover all cross-border parents who need to stay and take care of their children in Hong Kong. Although two-way-permit is issued by the Chinese government and not Hong Kong government, we suggest that the Hong Kong government should communicate with the Chinese government on this matter, and coordinate to extend the scope of the policy.

5.5 Household Registration (Hukou)

Hong Kong Identity Card and Mainland *hukou* are inherently incompatible. Despite suggestions and discussions for a few years, currently there are no clear official procedures or guidelines for Hong Kong-born Mainland children to give up their permanent resident status in order to apply for *hukou*. China and Hong Kong can negotiate a proper mechanism for parents to voluntarily exchange their children's Hong Kong permanent resident status with Mainland *hukou*, but the outcomes that parents may face must be clearly stated, such as whether they will be fined for violating the one-child policy, or whether the exchanged *hukou* guarantees the same rights as a regular one.

5.6 Special Employment Permission

One of the most frequent policy suggestions made by Mainland parents in our interviews was the permission to work in Hong Kong. All the interviewed parents stated that if they were permitted to work in Hong Kong, they would not need to apply for social assistance, which subjects them to stigmatization of welfare-reliance.

We suggest that the Hong Kong government should consider granting conditional work permission to parents of low-income cross-border families. We understand immigration policy and the policy on importation of labour have long been tight in Hong Kong, and the above suggestion may be controversial. However, measures can be made to reduce public anxiety about the suggested policy. For instance, strict criteria can be incorporated into the policy so as to prevent abuse. One possibility is to limit special employment permission exclusively to Mainland parents who fulfil all the following conditions:

1. Parents whose children were born in Hong Kong
2. Parents whose Hong Kong-born children are under 18
3. Parents whose Hong Kong-born children are totally dependent on their parents
4. Parents who are currently not employed in Mainland China or elsewhere
5. Parents whose asset and income do not exceed certain limit (e.g. the limit for applying for CSSA)

The Hong Kong government can exercise thorough financial means test on every applicant's background, such as the value of asset and amount of income they have in Hong Kong, Mainland China and elsewhere. Moreover, in order to make sure that such policy would not exploit employment opportunity of local labour force, Mainland parents can be confined to work only in sectors with proven labour shortage.

5.7 *Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Elimination of Discrimination*

As reported by EOC (2016), there are significantly diverse opinions and confusion on the proposed protections in the Discrimination Law Review relating to residency status. Some opposing views raise concerns about the tension between Hong Kong people and Mainland Chinese, and the possibility for new immigrants to immediately claim the benefits of permanent residents. As clearly revealed in the current study, discrimination has been widely experienced by Hong Kong-born children of the Mainlanders, which adversely affects their education opportunities and other life chances. In this regard, we recommend that the government should conduct comprehensive public consultation and research to address public concerns and to clarify misunderstandings. The scope should not be limited to Mainland Chinese but a boarder coverage of all non-permanent residents in Hong Kong such as asylum seekers and refugees.

CHAPTER 6 DISSEMINATION

6.1 *Public Seminar*

A public seminar, titled “Cross-Borders, Confronting Boundaries” was held at Hong Kong Baptist University on 15th September 2018 (Saturday) for the research team to present papers on research findings (Poster attached in Appendix III). The PI, Dr. Chee Wai Chi introduced this project and presented a paper on “Disputed Migration, Contested Parenthood.” Her paper discusses the tensions between individual strategies to have children and manage a family on the one hand and state and social control over pregnant migrants on the other hand.

Project Co-I, Mr. IP Ping Lam, Joe outlined the overall social background of the informants, including why parents especially mothers in these families decided to give birth in Hong Kong, and the social and institutional discriminations they have been facing after residing in Hong Kong. One of the student researchers, Mr. Huang Shun Yang shared a case study to illustrate both vulnerabilities and resilience of Mainland mothers in Hong Kong.

To promote intellectual exchange, three experts on Chinese migration were also invited to present their recent research: Dr. Shirley Hung Suet-lin (Associate Head and Associate Professor, Department of Social Work), Dr. Peng Yinni (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology), and Dr. Anita Chan Kit Wa (Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Education University of Hong Kong). Various issues relating to Chinese migration were discussed, including contested parenthood of cross-border Mainland Chinese women, belongingness and identification of cross-border children amidst their mobility experience, the characteristics of social capital among migrant women, and the transformation of migrant mothering over generations in southern China.

The seminar was concluded with a discussion by Professor Vicky Tam, Associate Head of the Department of Education Studies.

CHAPTER 7 REFLECTIONS OF STUDENT RESEARCHERS

- 7.1 In total, 28 undergraduate and postgraduate students from the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Baptist University participated in the research project. They were given training workshops on the background of cross-border families, research ethics and methodology, and data analysis. They were then divided into 14 groups of 2 to visit and interview 28 cross-border families. At the end of each month student researchers attended a debriefing session to review their progress of home visits and share their experiences and difficulties during home visits and interviews. After the completion of the project, students submitted written reflections and comments on the project.
- 7.2 Most of the student researchers reported that the project helped them gain a deeper understanding of the living conditions of low-income cross-border families in Hong Kong. Student researchers reported that home visits and in-depth interviews helped to untangle their previous assumptions and stereotypes of cross-border families. Since they visited and interviewed informants with their research partner, the process equipped them with the experiences and skills of team work and team research. Also, they commented that training workshops provided them with useful skills and techniques to do both informal and formal interviews.
- 7.3 However, students generally thought that the duration of the research project was not long enough. It was hard for students to build rapport with and observe the daily life of cross-border families with only 5 visits. Many students thought that the monthly debriefing sessions were very useful for them to improve their interview skills and share the stories of other families. However, they wished they could have more time to share their experiences and observations. Some students also noted that their partner was late or absent from the debriefing session. One difficulty for non-Cantonese speaking student researchers was language barrier – some student researchers are Mainland students who do not speak Cantonese. However, Mainland parents in this project are mainly from Guangdong Province and nearby area. They usually speak Cantonese in their everyday life. This issue was partly resolved as we paired up a Cantonese-speaking student researcher with a non-Cantonese speaking one.

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APPENDIX I

關注低收入中港跨境家庭研究

包括但不只限於以下的家訪問題：

家長：

1. 請你形容一下你的日常生活。
2. 請描述你昨天做了什麼。昨天的生活跟平常的一樣嗎？
3. 你來香港前對香港有什麼的印象？來到後有所改變嗎？
4. 在香港時，你有沒有經常接觸香港人呢？你對他們有什麼印象？
5. 你與鄰居的關係怎樣？
6. 你幾多歲？孩子幾多歲？
7. 你來了香港多久？
8. 剛來香港時，你是怎樣租房子呢？
9. 生完孩子後，你坐月子的情況如何？
10. 鄉下在哪裏？
11. 還有什麼親人在鄉下？與他們的關係如何？
12. 如有孩子還在大陸，與他們的關係如何？
13. 有沒有親人在香港？如有，生孩子前後的關係有所改變嗎？
14. 多久會回鄉一次？多數是什麼時間回去？孩子會跟你一塊兒回去嗎？
15. 回鄉辦簽證時會帶孩子一塊兒回去嗎？還是有誰會幫你帶孩子？
16. 現時平均每月總收入大約多少？主要收入來源是什麼？每月能有多少儲蓄？以前又有多少？
17. 週末或放學後，你會和孩子到哪裏玩？
18. 你滿意現時的居住環境嗎？你認為有什麼的困難？
19. 如果你或孩子身體出了問題，會怎樣解決？是否會到醫院或診所？
20. 他們會提供金錢的資助嗎？
21. 你會比較希望你的孩子在香港，還是中國大陸接受教育？為什麼？
22. 你在大陸時受過什麼程度的教育呢？你覺得香港，還是中國大陸的教育比較好？你覺得怎樣的教育才是對小孩子最好？
23. 你有沒有後悔在香港生小孩／帶小孩過來讀書？
24. 你在為孩子尋找香港學位時有沒有遇到困難？如果有，你怎樣解決？你有沒有得到任何人或機構的幫助呢？如果有，他們是香港人抑或是大陸的人或機構呢？你怎樣看這些機構呢？
25. 你在幫助孩子尋找教育資源時遇到什麼的困難？（例如學費、教育津貼申請資料、補習班、興趣班、課外書籍等。）
26. 請問你在香港有沒有遇到過歧視？請你形容一下你的經歷和反應。
27. 你認為在香港面對過最大的困難是什麼？

28. 你自己或對孩子有什麼擔心？你對現時的生活有什麼感受？你想怎樣改變現時的生活狀態嗎？
29. 你覺得在什麼時候／狀態下生活會比較好？
30. 你覺得現在的生活最需要什麼的支援？（例如金錢的支援、托兒服務等。）
31. 你現在期待有怎樣的生活呢？你將來有什麼計劃？

小孩:

1. 請你形容一下你的日常生活。
2. 請描述你昨天做了什麼。昨天的生活跟平常的一樣嗎？
3. 你認為你的學校生活如何？你喜歡在香港讀書嗎？為什麼？
4. 你喜歡在香港生活嗎？喜歡大陸，還是香港多一點？
5. 你平時有什麼愛好或興趣嗎？喜歡什麼？
6. 在假日會做什麼？（例如會在家人在一起活動嗎？）
7. 你會經常與媽媽聊天嗎？
8. 你覺得媽媽辛苦嗎？會幫忙做家務嗎？
9. 你會多久見一次爸爸或其他在大陸的兄弟姐妹？你與他們的關係如何？
10. 假日時，你會希望在香港，還是大陸呢？
11. 你在學校遇到過什麼的困難？你去找誰幫忙？你有沒有找到你所需要的，或是有沒有得到幫助？
12. 在學校裏，跟你最要好的三個同學中，有沒有本地香港人呢？
13. 在學校裏，你覺得香港本地的同學對你友善嗎？
14. 在學校裏，有跟你同樣背景的同學嗎？
15. 老師或同學是否知道你來自跨境家庭？
16. 你在學校有沒有什麼事情令你不開心？有沒有被同學欺負？請你形容一下你被欺負的經歷和反應。
17. 你覺得現時的生活最需要什麼的支援？
18. 你將來有什麼計劃？長大後想做什麼工作？

APPENDIX II

Profiles of Individual Families in this Research

Family	Family Size in HK	No. of Children in HK	Single-parent Family	Housing Type	CSSA Recipient	Parent's Visa Type	Major Sources of Subsistence
F1	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Alimony from ex-husband, Church
F2	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	No	One-year multiple-entry	Church
F3	3	2	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Parent's income in Mainland, Church
F4	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F5	4	3	Yes	Public Housing	Yes	One-year multi-entry	CSSA
F6	2	2	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	NGOs
F7	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Church
F8	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	One-year multiple-entry	CSSA
F9	3	2	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Food Bank, Church, NGOs
F10	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	One-year multiple-entry	CSSA, NGOs
F11	3	2	No	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F12	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	One-year multiple-entry	CSSA, NGOs
F13	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F14	2	1	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Church

F15	2	1	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Church
F16	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F17	3	2	No	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA
F18	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	One-year multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F19	2	1	No	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F20	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church, NGOs
F21	2	1	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Church, NGOs
F22	5	3	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Parent's income in Mainland
F23	3	2	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	NGOs
F24	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Church
F25	2	1	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Parent's income in Mainland, Food Bank
F26	2	1	Yes	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Parent's income in Mainland
F27	3	2	No	Sub-Divided Flat	No	Three-month multiple-entry	Parent's income in Mainland
F28	3	2	No	Sub-Divided Flat	Yes	Three-month multiple-entry	CSSA, Parent's income in Mainland, Church

Public Seminar

Crossing Borders, Confronting Boundaries

15 Sept. 2018 (Sat) | 1:45 - 5:00pm | AAB 706

This seminar features talks by experts on Chinese migration and sharing of students who participated in a research project on "Low-Income Mainland-Hong Kong Cross-Border Families" sponsored by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Speakers



Dr CHAN, Kit Wa Anita,
Associate Professor,
Department of Social Sciences,
Education University of Hong Kong



Dr CHEE, Wai-chi,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Education Studies,
Hong Kong Baptist University



Dr HUNG, Suet-lin Shirley,
Associate Head and Associate Professor,
Department of Social Work,
Hong Kong Baptist University



Dr PENG, Yinni,
Associate Professor,
Department of Sociology,
Hong Kong Baptist University

Discussant



Professor TAM, C W Vicky,
Professor and Associate Head,
Department of Education Studies,
Hong Kong Baptist University

Venue:
AAB 706, Academic &
Administration Building,
Hong Kong Baptist University

Schedule

Time (pm)	Speaker	Content
1:45-2:00	Dr. Wai-chi Chee	Welcome speech and brief introduction of the project on "Low-Income Mainland-Hong Kong Cross-Border Families"
2:00-2:30	Mr. Ip Ping Lam, Joe Mr. Huang Shun Yang	Sharing by student participants
2:30-3:00	Dr. Wai-chi Chee	"Disputed Migration, Contested Parenthood"
3:00-3:15	Break	
3:15-3:45	Dr. Anita K.W. Chan	"Borders, Mobility and Belongingness of Chinese Cross-Border Students"
3:45-4:15	Dr. Hung Suet Lin Dr. Fung Kwok Kin	"Understanding Social Capital in Migrant Women from Mainland China to Hong Kong"
4:15-4:45	Dr. Yinni Peng	"Migrant Mothering in Transition: Maternal Narratives and Practices of Two Generations of Rural-Urban Migrant Mothers in Southern China"
4:45-5:00	Professor Vicky Tam	Discussion

All are welcome!

Organizers:



Department of
Education Studies
香港浸會大學教育學系



社會科學院
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES