Return Migration: The Case of the 1.5 Generation of Taiwanese in Canada and New Zealand*

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Abstract

This study draws on examples of young Taiwanese immigrants returning from Canada and New Zealand to examine the phenomenon of a floating population. It uses qualitative research methods to interview 25 young returnees who emigrated overseas with their parents at a young age in the 1980s and 1990s but who have now returned to

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Taiwan. The principal research questions include reasons for emigration, return and adaptation in Taiwan, and their future plans. The major reasons their parents left Taiwan include perceptions of better education for children, fear of a possible invasion of Taiwan by Communist China, and the search for a better living environment. The reasons reported by young people for their return to Taiwan include employment opportunities, family and marriage, and personal aspirations. Although these return migrants were born and raised partly in Taiwan, they reported encountering reverse culture shock during their adaptation process. More than half of the interviewees think that they would like to move back to the place to which they had emigrated for a better living environment and for their children’s education in the future. The migratory trajectories of these young people indicate that they can best be described as floating global citizens. The article suggests the need to increase research on the younger generation of returnees and to revise government recruitment policies in Taiwan.

I. Introduction

Emigration from Taiwan increased rapidly after the early 1980s encouraged by rising personal incomes, children’s educational needs, cross-strait political tensions, and the relaxation of travel restrictions on Taiwanese citizens in 1989, as well as by the introduction of supportive economic and business migration policies by various countries targeting skilled and entrepreneurial immigrants. Recently, however, an increasing number of those who migrated as children with their parents to countries including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have returned to Taiwan as adults.

Since the turn of the century, various aspects of Taiwanese emigrants have been studied with respect to their employment status, their residential mobility, the changing roles of women in the family and community, and their identities. Relatively little research has addressed the younger generation, such as those who emigrated with their parents when they were young, and those who have returned to Taiwan.

Without making special efforts to monitor changes in population mobility due to emigration and return migration, government statistics are inadequate for the researcher. My fieldwork in destination countries in the past ten years supports the idea that lots of people have returned and have been traveling back and forth (lailai ququ 來來去去). The magnitude of return migrants to Hong Kong has produced large impacts