

From A Fishing Village To A Cosmopolitan City: The Factors Contributing To

The Dramatically Increasing Migrant Population In Shenzhen Since The 1980s

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Abstract

Shenzhen is a young city with a forty-year history developing from a small fishing village to a metropolis, and its population and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) have increased explosively during this period. Economics and population interact and promote each other, proving that the rising population indispensable to the progress of cities and population are attractive to these prosperous areas. I analyze why people migrate by drawing on literature and migration theories, including push and pull theory, brain drain and brain gain. Besides, I take Shenzhen as an example to discuss—combined with its advantages on various aspects to find out the reasons for the rapid rise of Shenzhen's population. I found that historical, geographical, policy, and cultural factors are the main reasons people migrate to Shenzhen, while Shenzhen also has some negative factors that repel people living in Shenzhen to some extent.

Keywords

Shenzhen; Migration; Migrants; Push and pull theory; Brain drain and brain gain; Economic reform

Introduction

Shenzhen, the cosmopolitan city with the third-largest GDP in China in 2019, is China's most successful Special Economic Zone (SEZ) (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020, 2020). Before the economic reform in 1978, it was merely a small fishing village with fewer than 20,000 people (Wang & Wu, 2020).

Following the implementation of economic reform in 1978 and the establishment of the Shenzhen SEZ in 1980, the permanent population in Shenzhen began to significantly from 314.1 thousand in 1979 to 13.44 million in 2019 (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020, 2020). The scale of the permanent population in Shenzhen increased by more than 41 times in just 40 years; for now, it is one of the cosmopolises with the greatest number of migrants in China (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020, 2020). The factors that influence the mobility of migrants are an important research area worth being lucubrating. This dissertation evaluates the impact of different factors on migration and compares them to find the key factors that trigger Chinese citizens' internal movement.

The author takes Shenzhen as the research object since it is a typical migrant city with a

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significantly growing population due to internal migration in the past four decades (Ajeckstein, 2011). Besides, several important factors also contribute to migration in Shenzhen, including historical factors, geographical factors, policy factors and cultural factors. These factors affect the migrants to different extent as diverse factors possess various degrees of attractiveness to different people. The combination of the influence of these factors leads to the occurrence of migration.

This dissertation refers to the literature on migration and society to explore why Chinese people migrate to Shenzhen since China's "opening-up" and "economic reform". These are two policies imposed by the Chinese central government in 1978, its primary purpose was to build a special economic zone in Shenzhen to attract foreign enterprises to invest and do business. In the Literature Review section, some basic definitions and famous migration theories, push and pull theory have been discussed, which are helpful for later analysis of Shenzhen's migrants. After that, I review the history of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and compare historical statistics of its GDP and population. In the Discussion paragraph, several possible factors that contribute to the growing population are analyzed and evaluated.

Definition of migration

According to Lee (1965), 'migration' can be described as the movement of people from one place to another with intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily, at a new location. Migrants are the people who relocate the region of their residence for specific reasons and purposes. These purposes may include seeking better job opportunities or healthcare needs. In recent days, migration can refer to human mobility from either a shorter or a longer distance: the migrants may just travel for a few kilometers or even emigrate to other countries (Lee, 1965).

Types of migrants

There are several types of migrants, such as individual migrants and family migrants (Wang & Wu, 2010). Individual migrants are those

who set out alone to seek opportunities in the city. They could be students who graduate from universities or entrepreneurs (Lee, 1965) who migrate to Shenzhen to start a business. These kinds of migrants are mainly in search of jobs and live in Shenzhen alone. In terms of family migrants, they are those who migrate in the form of a household. The family members migrate to the same destination and live together in the receiving city (Lee, 1965). Family migrants usually travel with their kids, and migration might influence the development of children. In this case, family migrants bring their wealth from the origin to the destination and inject new money into the economy (Lee, 1965). It is believed that family migrants make up a significant part of migrants since a large number of workers might bring their children and parents to Shenzhen at the same time. However, plenty of people in Shenzhen would go back to their hometown on the new year and other festivals, thereby, the population of the migration city decreased at that time.

On the other hand, migrants are a source of the labor force. Low-skilled labors can be described as those who possess relatively low educational background and only master a few skills, such as a worker in a factory, a bus driver, and a waiter (Wang & Wu, 2010). They may earn the average income in society but are the majority of the labor force. Another type is the high-skilled labors, who are usually identified as well-educated talents, such as white-collar workers, scientists, officials. They have a relatively prestigious social status and a decent income compared low skilled workers.

Furthermore, migrants in Shenzhen can also be classified into two groups: domestic and international migrants. International migrants hold foreign passports but without household registration in Shenzhen. At the same time, it is not easy for domestic migrant workers from other cities or rural areas in China to get household registration in Shenzhen, although they might have jobs and have lived in Shenzhen for many years (Chan, 2010). In this dissertation, the research only focuses on the



domestic migrants who move from other parts of China to Shenzhen.

Push and pull theory

In 1965, Everett S. Lee proposed the push and pull theory (Figure 1) in his dissertation "A Theory of Migration" (Lee, 1965). That is a popular theory to demonstrate the mobility of migrants. It explains human's migration based on the factors that affect people's decisions. The four main elements of the theory are factors associated with the origin, factors associated with the destination, intervening obstacles and personal factors. On the other hand, the factors that influence migrants can be classified into three groups. Firstly, the factors that attract or hold people into an area. Secondly, the factors that repel people to remain in the place. And lastly, the factors that can be neglected.

Individuals with different characteristics would be impacted to a various extent by these three groups of factors. Broadly speaking, some factors similarly affect most individuals. For instance, mild weather would be attractive to most migrants. In contrast, some factors significantly affect a part of migrants while indifferent to others such as a reputable college is appealing to a family with students while it would be much less attractive to the old. However, some personal factors influence the motion of migrants that we are unable to determine precisely. Therefore, there is always uncertainty in analyzing the migration patterns by using the push and pull theory.

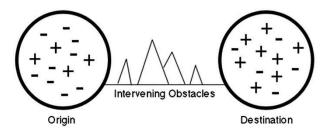


Figure 1 The sketch of push and pull theory

It is undeniable that push and pull theory is one of the most significant theories in the fields of migration and population, it possesses very high authority among scholars and researchers.

Although the pull and push theory has been proposed for more than fifty-five years, it is still adequate to illustrate the phenomenon of mass migrants flowing into Shenzhen in the past forty years. However, this theory sometimes simplifies migrants' decision-making process, it cannot explain the migration in certain situations. For instance, some Japanese emigrate from Japan to China (Aoyama, 2012), relocating from a society with a sophisticated welfare system to a relatively less developed country. The push and pull theory is not suitable to describe migration in such a situation.

Brain drain and brain gain

Many talents are migrants as well, and they are critical to the progression of a city. The mobility of talents can be regarded as a kind of migration pattern demonstrated by the brain drain and brain gain (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011).

Brain drain is the departure of intellectual and technical elites such as scientists, doctors, and engineers flow out from an area to a more favorable environment in search of greener pastures. In contrast, brain gain describes the opposite of brain drain, which is when many trained and talented individuals seek entrance into an area with high development potential or a professional environment that attracts plenty of highly skilled and educated talents to relocate (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011).

From my point of view, the pull and push factors correlate with brain drain and brain gain, reinforcing the mobility of migrants. The pull factors are positive factors that pull the labor force and human capital to the destination that encourages brain gain, whilst push factors discourage people from remaining at their origin, leading to the brain drain in their hometown (Lee, 1965). Talents from underdeveloped regions accumulate in the developed regions and rapidly relocate to permanent settlements in the megacities. Consequently, the potential growth developed areas increases continuously and the economy becomes more advanced. In contrast, the critical shortage of quality human resources



becomes a severe problem in the areas where they suffer from brain drain. These areas lack relatively high skilled workers. Thereby, the development would be slower and more challenging than the brain gain areas. Finally, a degenerative feedback circulation is established in the brain drain area, these areas will become less competitive and harder to develop.

Based on Dustmann, Fadlon and Weiss's research *Return migration, human capital accumulation and the brain drain*, the labor force can be regarded as a kind of capital and population mobility can be explained as an economic activity. The decision of migrants responds to "where human capital can be acquired more efficiently and where the return to human capital is highest". The rate of human capital accumulation determines the region's economic growth rate and varies over different areas.

Commonly, "a person may move to a country where her skills grow fast and then apply these skills in a different country where these skills have a high price" (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011). Consequently, a significant discrepancy is revealed between human and physical or financial capital, that is, "Human capital cannot be separated from its owner and he/she must move to exploit differences in returns in different locations" (Dustmann, Fadlon & Weiss, 2011).

Discussion

After reviewing the definition and classical migration theories, the following section will evaluate the four factors: the history of the Shenzhen SEZ, Shenzhen's geographical advantage, the policy factor, and the Shenzhen inclusive cultural environment for migration.

Historical factor: China and its economic reform since 1978: the history of Shenzhen special economic zone

According to Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020 (2020), its economics has progressed dramatically since 1979. The city is well known for its economic achievement at home and abroad. Besides, the rich economic environment

has become more and more attractive to migrants.

The policy of economic reform which refers to internal reform and opening to the outside world began to be implemented at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978 (Jian, 2017). In cities, the autonomy of state-owned enterprises has been markedly improved. On January 17, 1992, Deng Xiaoping, vice chairman of the Communist Party of China (CPC) central committee, vice-premier of the state council, started his southern trip while sitting on a train to south China. From January 18 to February 21, Deng visited Shenzhen and other places, making important speeches requiring that "we must seize favorable opportunities, accelerate the pace of reform and opening up, and strive to achieve a new national economy level"(Jian, 2017).

At the beginning of 1979, Guangdong Provincial Party Committee and the Provincial Government decided to set up special export zones in Shenzhen and Zhuhai. At the end of March 1980, the State Council held a working meeting in Guangzhou to put forward some important policies for the special pilot zone. On August 26, 1980, the Fifteenth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress approved the "Regulations on Special Economic Zones of Guangdong Province." (Jian, 2017)

The establishment of the Shenzhen special economic zone stimulated many people flowing into Guangdong province to do business and seek job opportunities because of the beneficial economic policies and preferential economic environment there. Meanwhile, the reinforcement of population mobility is aimed at common prosperity, people who get rich first drive the other people to become rich. This would facilitate the movement of the population to promote economic development further.

Table 1 The growing population of Shenzhen and its GDP



Year	Year-end Permanent Population /10000 persons	Natural Growth Rate/‰	Gross Domestic Product /10000 yuan	Gross Domestic Product Per Capita /yuan
1979	31.41	18.90	19,368	606
1989	141.60	11.05	1,156,565	8,838
1999	632.56	9.61	18,246,876	30,088
2009	995.01	12.84	85,144,707	87,360
2019	1,343.88	20.39	269,270,920	203,489

According to Table 1, the Year-end Permanent Population grew steadily from 314.1 thousand yuan in 1979 to 13.4388 million yuan in 2019. There was a decrease in the Natural Growth Rate from 18.90% in 1979 to 9.61% in 1999, and it then increased until 20.39‰ in 2019. Both Gross Domestic Product and Gross Domestic Product per capita have soared dramatically from 193.68 million yuan and 606 yuan to more than 2.69 trillion yuan and 203 thousand yuan respectively during the past forty years. (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020, 2020). Consequently, we could indicate from the graph that the economic growth of Shenzhen is associated with the rapidly growing population due to the migrants.

In sum, after the establishment of Shenzhen SEZ in 1980, Shenzhen's GDP has risen dramatically, as well as the scale of its population. To some extent, the establishment of SEZ is a historical factor that impacts the domestic migration to Shenzhen.

Geographical factor: positional advantages and locational industrial development in Shenzhen

From my perspective, geographical and regional development correlates with the increasing number of migrants in Shenzhen. The extent to which various factors influence migration are differentiated, while the geographical location is one of the most significant contributing elements.

First of all, Shenzhen is near the south China sea in Guangdong province with a subtropical marine climate. In 2019, the mean air temperature was 24.0 centigrade which was the highest record since 1990. Besides, the year precipitation was 1880.1 millimeters in 2019 (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020, 2020). According to the data, Shenzhen is a city with abundant precipitation and warmth compared to other China cities. The comfortable climate is appealing to many retired people who settle down in Shenzhen and benefit tourism growth. What is more, the favorable climate condition also enhances the transnational ocean trade. The past forty years have witnessed an increase in the amount of cargo handling from 100 thousand tons in 1979 to more than 258 million tons in 2019 (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2020, 2020).

Location

Shenzhen locates east of the Pearl River Delta and adjacent to Hong Kong, enabling it to become the bridge connecting the mainland and Hong Kong (Figure 2). Benefiting from the expedient geographical location advantage, Shenzhen has several large deep-water ports. The western port area has 70 kilometers coastal line, and the southern part of this region is low depositional with a depth of water up to 12 meters. Besides, the water channel is closed to the coast and does not need to dredge, and the wave intensity is also relatively weak. Hence, it possesses the hydrological condition deep-water ports. Meanwhile, the eastern port area with total 150 kilometers even has deeper (up to 16 meters) water and broader bay area, although sea wave is fiercer there, it is still advantageous to build deep-water ports (Luo, 1991).

Besides, these giant harbors provide many job opportunities for migrants. As I have mentioned



in the Literature Review, low-skilled labor, different from talents, is a significant part of migrants. Most of the low-skilled workers earn money by manual work or some simple skills—for instance, security guards, dispatchers, truck drivers in the harbors.

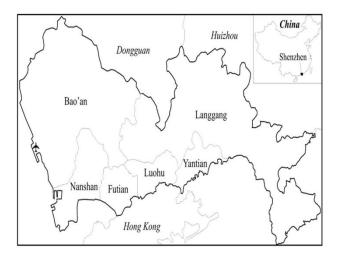


Figure 2. The position of Shenzhen and Hong Kong

Industrial development

In recent years, Shenzhen has transferred from primary industries such as agriculture and fishery to secondary industries, including Foxconn's labor-intensive factories. Its tertiary industries have developed rapidly as well, culture, sports and recreation seem to have a promising prospect. Many internet companies and sophisticated technology companies have set up their headquarters in Shenzhen. For example, a famous Chinese internet enterprise, Tencent, settled its headquarters in the Tencent building on August 24, 2009. In addition, the industrial cluster effect occurs in Shenzhen (Chen, Shyu, 2005). Industrial clusters are a common phenomenon in the process of industrialization, referring to many enterprises of different scales and levels in the division of labor concentrating in a specific industry within an area. They closely connect through a crossed network relationship. Since many flourishing businesses and factories are located in Shenzhen, the considerable demand for labor force attracts many workers to migrate to Shenzhen.

Nevertheless, these geographical advantages are insufficient for Shenzhen to develop from a small village to a metropolitan city at such a surprising rate. The following section will discuss the policy which is a key to distinguishing Shenzhen from other cities.

Policy factor: the local policy and talent flow

The Chinese central government introduced preferential economic policies in Shenzhen since Shenzhen has excellent potential for economic development. To appeal to more high-quality talents, the central government sets up many subsidies and benefits for them to work and settle in Shenzhen. Besides, there are many favorable policies for entrepreneurs in business.

Economic policy

Because of Shenzhen's advantageous position, the National People's Congress approved the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, and preferential economic policies were also given. For example, business autonomy, reduction in taxation, discounts on foreign exchange management, product sales, entry and exit management. Many domestic and foreign companies were attracted by these beneficial policies and continuously increasing investment accelerated the economic development of the special economic zone. Shenzhen has firstly established the basic framework of a market economy system with the theme of public ownership and development of multiple economic components on equal status which has also affected the mainland (Liang, 1999).

"Talent" policy

Apart from economic policies, Shenzhen's government also proposes many welfare policies to attract migrants to stay in Shenzhen. According to the "Brain drain and brain gain" model, these policies enable Shenzhen to obtain more human resources to create a positive circulation for its urban development according to "Brain drain and brain gain" model.

Shenzhen has a preferential residency policy which is also beneficial for farmers who come from the countryside. The government has introduced the newest policy that after obtaining the household registration of Shenzhen, people



from the countryside can still enjoy the benefit given by their hometown government and change their place of household registration back to their hometown at any time. In addition, the Shenzhen government provides a subsidy of up to 60,000 yuan to talents who gain household registration in Shenzhen. There are two types of talent subsidy that the district government and municipal government give and the value of assistance depends on the degree, from 15,000 to 30,000 corresponding from undergraduate to Ph.D. (Wang, 2021).

In general, more developed regions would concentrate more talents which are known as brain gain. Talents can make full use of their techniques and earn high salaries there and these areas become more flourishing with the presence of many talents. Shenzhen is an attractive city to the youngsters, workers and entrepreneurs. Countless people arrive in Shenzhen with a dream to seek job opportunities and better living standards. Besides, the preferential migration household registration policies are beneficial to the people who work in Shenzhen. These advantages of Shenzhen are decisive pull factors that appeal to migrants and subsequently lead to the occurrence of a migration stream.

However, the tightening requirements of the household registration system limit acquisition of benefits for migrant workers and their kids. People without household registration cannot access medical subsidies, and children without household registration cannot enroll in public schools in Shenzhen (Wang & Wu, 2010). As the increasing migrants bring a sufficient supply of labor force, the price in the labor market might drop, hence it is problematic for many workers to make a living with such low pay in Shenzhen. As a result, the disadvantages may outweigh the pull factors for some migrants.

Cultural factor: Shenzhen's culture and social environment

Shenzhen is a young and energetic city with its own city's culture. Young workers inject great vitality into Shenzhen. People from diverse places can get along well in Shenzhen with little cultural exclusion.

Migrants and local people have formed Shenzhen's unique city culture during the past forty years. As China's most prominent migrant city (Xie, 2013), 75% of its citizens are migrants (Xie, 2013). Shenzhen involves diverse cultures from different areas at home and abroad and forms a distinct migrant culture. Additionally, there are many urban villages in Shenzhen, around 50% of residents live there (Guo Herrmann-Pillath, 2021) indigenous culture is also significant. These two kinds of cultures interact and incorporate each Shenzhen culture. create the to (Herrmann-Pillath, 2018).

Millions of young migrants flew into the city and brought vivid and innovative ethos, their average age was only 30 (Herrmann-Pillath, 2018). Most migrants come to Shenzhen to seek job opportunities and they pursue efficiency. Shenzhen evolved from a small fishing village to a megacity in just a few decades known as "instant city", it was impossible to develop at such a super pace without many migrants and the spirit of efficiency. What is more, the famous slogan "you are the Shenzhen people once you come here" is a typical example of Shenzhen migration culture (Lai, 2021). Everyone is a Shenzhen person as long as they live and work in Shenzhen. The discrepancies of hometown and dialect are eliminated, and all migrants treat themselves as Shenzhen people. This slogan can be described as a part of cultural governance (Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2021), aiming to unite migrants from various origins and enhance cohesion and the sense of belonging to Shenzhen. The cultural identity of Shenzhen is essential and not only the national governance but also public awareness. However, only by getting the household registration can citizens qualify for subsidies and enroll in public schools. It seems that not every Shenzhen people own the same rights.

On the other hand, because "they (urban village) are substantial in Shenzhen: It is estimated that



about 50% of Shenzhen population lives in these places" (Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2021) local culture has a non-negligible impact on the formation of Shenzhen's culture. It also contains traditional Chinese values that share the same notions with Communist Party cultural governance policy, such as harmony and friendship. Moreover, the locals are kindly to migrants due to the concepts of being hospitable and comprehensive (Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2021).

Shenzhen is known as an "instant city" due to its dramatic expansion rate. (Ajeckstein, 2011). Shenzhen has expanded rapidly because people who work in Shenzhen regard efficiency as important as their lives. This spirit held by workers enables Shenzhen to develop from a small fishing village to a cosmopolis in just forty years. Subsequently, people with different cultural backgrounds integrate and pursue the same target—greater efficiency. Although they come from various places, they work as teams to increase their effectiveness. Meanwhile, the otherness between cultures is ignored, the unique Shenzhen culture is created by many people who come from all over China. Disparate from other places, cultural discrimination is rare in Shenzhen (Herrmann-Pillath, 2018).

However, according to *The Dream City or not?* The Urban Revolution of Shenzhen written by Yuting Xie, "local system and global system run parallel in this city, and the life circles of both groups are rare to meet. Ironically, both groups in Shenzhen have a low sense of belonging. They are just passers in the "dream city", fighting for a bright future and taking the fortune back to their hometown to share with their families; thus, Shenzhen is a city without roots." Just forty years is not long enough for Shenzhen to accumulate a rich history. Although Shenzhen provides an engaging environment to migrants, some push factors still repel migrants from settling down. The high price level of Shenzhen is unaffordable to low-wage groups, their living quality might be lower in Shenzhen than in other cities. Besides, household registration is inaccessible for some

people; hence, going to other cities would be a better choice for some people in Shenzhen.

Shenzhen's unique culture arises due to the combination of migrant culture and local culture. Migrant culture is open-minded and industrious, while local culture from urban villages includes traditional Chinese values and is comprehensive to the migrants. However, although the government has introduced the slogan "you are the Shenzhen people once you come here", some people still lack belonging to Shenzhen. Meanwhile, low-skilled workers may struggle to live in Shenzhen and are more likely to leave.

Nevertheless, forty years have passed since the establishment of Shenzhen SEZ grown up from the young to middle age group, and the proportion of the youngsters in the whole population is decreasing. As the city becomes not as young as before, it would be less attractive to migrants. Moreover, the population growth rate would drop due to the advancement of other competitive and energetic cities.

Conclusion

This research has analyzed factors contributing dramatically increasing population in Shenzhen through reviews related to literature and data of Shenzhen. In the 1980s. the government established a Special Economic Zone in Shenzhen, stimulating the local economy and attracting the migrants' flow. Geographically, Shenzhen is a port city adjacent to Hong Kong, having a natural advantage in foreign trade. Moreover, Shenzhen's native culture is open-minded and inclusive, and it fuses with migration culture to form unique Shenzhen culture. Many migrant workers are attracted by this inclusive culture and decide to settle down in Shenzhen. However, Shenzhen's high price level and the issue of household registration are two of the push factors that exclude migrants from living in Shenzhen.

Initially, I believed several certain factors impelled the migration in Shenzhen and some negative factors that repulsed people went to Shenzhen. During the project, I gradually found that although some factors influenced migration



dominantly, many other factors have contributed as well. Migration is a complicated topic that relates to many aspects. All these factors interact and correlate with others, and we should take them as a whole system that influences migration instead of considering each of them individually. I would conclude that in this dissertation, I have analyzed the most influential factors that attract the public to migrate to Shenzhen and some factors that prevent the migration.

Nevertheless, some limitations exist in this dissertation. Other factors that might affect migration, except those that have been discussed, such as the influence of social media and the health system of Shenzhen, have not been evaluated in this dissertation. Meanwhile, the effect of the natural growth of the population is not taken into account. During the past forty years, the Chinese population has grown on a national scale. Although some aspects can be improved, this research has evaluated most of the factors that impact the increasing population of Shenzhen. Besides, the population and GDP gap between Shenzhen and other emerging cities is decreasing, Shenzhen's advantages are becoming less appealing to new migrants since they have more choices nowadays. Besides, more and more graduates and other workers decide to start a business and develop in their hometown rather than in a huge city which is stressful.

To sum up, Shenzhen's dramatic advancement from a fishing village to a cosmopolitan city is inseparable from its rapid population expansion, while migrants are the essential constituent of Shenzhen's people. Plenty of factors facilitate the population mobility and beget Shenzhen to become attractive and fascinating, I have analyzed historical factors, geographical factors, policy factors and cultural factors in the dissertation which I suppose are the most influential.

Conflict of Interests: the author has claimed that no conflict of interests exists.

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