The Impact of City Immigrants: Take Shenzhen as an Example

Jinsi Chen *

School of Nansha College Preparatory Academy, Guangdong, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 2250006@ncpachina.org

Abstract. Shenzhen's transformation into a global tech hub and immigrant metropolis is noteworthy, with foreigners making up 60% of its population and symbolizing a unique cultural identity and economic dynamism. However, this wave of migration also brings challenges such as soaring housing and education costs, hindering integration and well-being. However, these burdens can be alleviated by increasing affordable housing, strengthening financial support for education, and relaxing hukou registration requirements. This essay delved into the impact of migration on Shenzhen's growth, the difficulties migrants encounter in Shenzhen, and evaluated their strategies to address related challenges, and proposed holistic solutions to promote integration and urban well-being. Ultimately, creating a more inclusive and accessible environment will not only contribute to the continued development of the city but will also serve as a model for other cities with large immigrant populations.

Keywords: Urbanization; migration; cultural identity.

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of unparalleled urbanization and extensive global interconnectedness, cross-border human migration has become a defining characteristic of contemporary cities. Notably, 1980 marked a significant turning point for Shenzhen with the introduction of China's reform and opening-up program. This once unremarkable fishing village underwent a rapid transformation into a leading Special Economic Zone. Within just three decades, it became a dominant force in the global technology and economy and a symbolic representation of an immigrant metropolis. This assertion is supported by statistical data showing that the foreign population in Shenzhen accounts for a significant 60% of the overall population. The urban area experienced remarkable growth, increasing from 310,000 inhabitants in 1979 to a staggering 13 million by 2019, a 42-fold increase [1]. In comparison, large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou experienced less than threefold population growth in the same period. Meanwhile, Shenzhen saw an exceptional influx of 11.79 million inhabitants [2], solidifying its status as the primary metropolis for population inflow in China.

However, Shenzhen, as an urban center of great significance, has been closely associated with its immigration narrative. This narrative comprises remarkable accomplishments that have often been overlooked in scholarly investigations of migration, which have predominantly concentrated on Western counterparts, notably the United States and Europe. The significance of Shenzhen as a metropolis of immigration, however, cannot be overstated. Over the course of thirty years, the city has experienced a transformative immigration phenomenon, leading to the emergence of a unique cultural identity and a vibrant economic framework. The resulting amalgamation has not only cultivated an atmosphere of inclusivity and diversity within the domain of immigrant culture but has also generated an economic structure characterized by receptiveness and ingenuity. This essay thoroughly analyses the positive effects of immigration on Shenzhen, critically evaluates the city's effective methods for addressing immigration-related difficulties and proposes measures to enhance integration and improve the overall well-being of the urban environment. Moreover, the significant significance of this study is in its potential to provide a guiding standard for other towns with immigrant populations throughout China.

2. The Positive Effects of Immigration On Shenzhen

2.1. Creativity

It is worth mentioning that the existence of young, creative, and ambitious immigrants has played a significant role in fostering an environment of innovation and inclusiveness within the cultural environment of Shenzhen. Shenzhen, a city established in 1979, holds the distinction of being the most recently established city in Guangdong Province. According to the latest census data, the average age of Shenzhen's 13 million permanent residents is 32.5 years. The population between the ages of 15 and 59 constitutes 79.5% of the total population, while individuals aged 60 and above account for only 5.36%, which is 13.4 percentage points lower than the national average [3]. The introduction of new talent acts as a source of abundant innovation and a catalyst for economic vitality. Shenzhen's permanent population is characterized by a remarkable proportion of highly educated persons, amounting to 37.1%. This demographic has played a key role in enhancing the city's research and development capacity, routinely surpassing the 90% benchmark for firms based in Shenzhen [4]. Moreover, the dominance of high-tech industries is emphasized by their significant contribution of 35.6% to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the city in the year 2014. Shenzhen demonstrated its remarkable capacity for innovation by leading the way with a significant number of patent applications in 2014, totaling 82,254. This achievement resulted in the successful granting of 53,687 patents. Significantly, this collective intellectual effort resulted in a remarkable increase in Shenzhen's per capita GDP to around $25,000, a level that has not been surpassed in the urban areas of China [3]. It is apparent that the arrival of individuals with exceptional skills and young people through the process of immigration has permanently altered Shenzhen, resulting in a significant hub of innovation and advancement. Furthermore, the presence of immigrants has significantly contributed to the formation and development of Shenzhen's unique cultural identity. Shenzhen, established as China's first special economic zone, is a bold and ambitious undertaking that is accompanied by inherent uncertainties. For the courageous individuals who have chosen to leave behind the familiarity of their hometowns in order to establish new lives in Shenzhen, every step taken in this unfamiliar land is filled with new experiences and the potential for the unexpected. This environment leads to the emergence of pioneering and innovative individuals who are at the forefront of developing new modes of thinking and lifestyles. Consequently, these individuals contribute novel ideas and concepts, establishing themselves as pioneers within modern culture [4]. Meanwhile, the inherent volatility of this geographical setting subjects' immigrants to the crucible of survival, shaping their resilience into a determined, pioneering, and inventive mindset. The spirit has been essential in propelling Shenzhen to the ranks of a worldwide hub for creativity.

2.2. Inclusivity

Moreover, the fluctuating and interactive movement of immigrants has stimulated the diffusion and blending of many cultures, thereby shaping Shenzhen into a stronghold of cultural inclusiveness. In Shenzhen, there is a widely recognized saying that states, "You are a Shenzhener once you come here [5]." This phrase encapsulates the inclusive nature of Shenzhen's community and the unique cultural identity that has been forged through the influence of immigration. This statement encapsulates the city's remarkable capacity to integrate individuals from many global backgrounds into its dynamic fabric of existence, cultivating a sense of inclusion beyond geographical origins. Furthermore, it is interesting that in Shenzhen, the prevailing language is not limited to Cantonese vernacular, Hakka, or Chaoshan dialect. Rather, the official language is Mandarin, so that immigrants do not feel exclusive. Additionally, Shenzhen boasts a diverse culinary environment, encompassing various regional cuisines from across the nation. Moreover, the city serves as a melting pot of customs and folk culture from different regions, offering visitors a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of various locales [6]. The embrace of inclusivity has consequently positioned Shenzhen as an exemplar of contemporary urban advancement, wherein the recognition and appreciation of variety are regarded as catalysts for fostering innovation, creativity, and economic well-being. The city's dedication to

integrating those who have just arrived not only enhances its social structure but also establishes it as an exemplar for other urban areas seeking to foster a harmonious cohabitation of diverse cultures within their own domains.

3. Challenges Faced by Immigrants In Shenzhen

3.1. High Housing Prices

Shenzhen offers a conducive atmosphere for individuals migrating in search of economic prospects and the pursuit of their aspirations. Nevertheless, the exorbitant housing expenses and limited access to educational facilities, along with the high cost of education, present substantial obstacles that make Shenzhen unattainable for a big segment of the populace. The current economic growth has resulted in a significant increase in real estate prices in Shenzhen, which poses a significant challenge for migrants seeking to settle in the city. As can be seen from Fig. 1, Shenzhen emerged as the top-ranking city nationwide, exhibiting an average house price level of 61,601 yuan per square meter. This surpassed the average house prices observed in Beijing and Shanghai [7]. Given the exorbitant cost of housing, a significant portion of the general populace is unable to meet their basic needs and may find it unfeasible to purchase a residential property even after diligently saving for an extended period of 10 years or more, potentially spanning several decades [8]. A significant proportion of individuals migrating to Shenzhen currently reside in dwellings lacking property ownership documentation, hence posing challenges in accessing adequate accommodation. The permanent population of Shenzhen is approximately 13.5 million. However, the available land supply in Shenzhen is significantly lower compared to the other three top-tier cities [9]. Consequently, the annual housing supply in Shenzhen is not as robust as that of the other first-tier cities. Over the past five years, the cumulative commercial residential sales area in Shenzhen amounted to 20.04 million square meters. In contrast, Beijing's cumulative commercial residential sales area during the same period reached 34.45 million square meters, while Shanghai's commercial residential sales area totaled 49.26 million square meters [10]. These figures indicate that Shenzhen's average annual new residential supply is only two-thirds of Beijing's or half of Shanghai's. This issue shows the current demand for housing surpasses the existing supply, resulting in increased prices and forcing many migrants to tolerate inadequate living conditions, share accommodations, or live in remote areas with restricted access to amenities and services. This situation not only adversely affects the immigrants' overall well-being but also hinders their ability to integrate into the local society and make meaningful contributions to urban development.

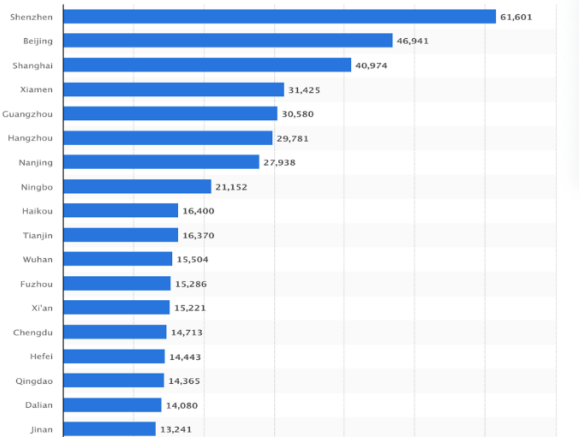

Fig. 1 Chinese Residential Real Estate Sales in 35 Large and Medium-Sized Cities in 2021 [7]

3.2. High Cost of Education

Moreover, the significant financial burden associated with housing costs indicates that a considerable proportion of migrants' income is dedicated to renting accommodations, limiting the

availability of funds for essential needs such as nourishment, medical care, and schooling. The availability of educational resources and the cost of education in Shenzhen is notably constrained. According to Chinese legislation, children who do not possess a local hukou (household registration) are deemed ineligible to enroll in public schools within the respective jurisdiction. As a result, the children of migrants living and working in Shenzhen are unable to avail themselves of public educational resources unless they modify their hukou registration. Nevertheless, the migrant population in Shenzhen is considerable, making it exceedingly challenging for the average individual to acquire a hukou registration quota. As a result, over 50% of the children residing in Shenzhen are currently enrolled in private educational institutions [11], which necessitate the payment of supplementary tuition fees. For those migrants who relocate to Shenzhen for employment and earn a meager income, these additional expenses undoubtedly exacerbate their financial strain, often forcing families to make tough choices between investing in their children's education or allocating funds for other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and housing. Furthermore, migrant children without local hukou face an additional disadvantage since they have restricted opportunities to acquire resources for their livelihood, education, and social development. As a result, individuals from rural areas frequently encounter discrimination and bias from prevailing urban individuals and collectives, hurting their overall physical and emotional welfare [11]. This circumstance not only has an impact on the advancement and maturation of a substantial population of migrant children and groups, but it also hinders the positive cycle of progress in both urban and rural regions of China. This situation further widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots, making it even more difficult for low-income migrants and their families to break out of the cycle of poverty and fully integrate into society, ultimately hindering not only their prospects but also the overall development and social cohesion of the city.

4. Solutions

Despite the presence of several challenges faced by immigrants in Shenzhen, such as exorbitant housing prices and elevated education expenses, it is important to acknowledge that viable solutions exist for these issues. In relation to the matter of elevated housing costs, it is advisable for the government to augment the availability of economical housing by means of constructing additional public housing units and fostering private developers to engage in the construction of inexpensive housing through the provision of incentives, such as tax exemptions or subsidies. Furthermore, the implementation of housing price regulations, the promotion of rental housing, and the optimization of urban planning and land use are other efficacious solutions for mitigating the housing problem. Furthermore, in order to address the issue of exorbitant education expenses, the government has the potential to augment financial support allocated to public educational institutions, extend subsidies to children from immigrant backgrounds, and alleviate the stringent hukou registration prerequisites to facilitate greater access to public schools for a larger number of children. Additionally, the promotion of increased accessibility to economically viable private educational institutions and the provision of financial assistance to socioeconomically disadvantaged households can serve to mitigate the financial strain associated with educational expenditures. In order to facilitate the complete integration of immigrants into society and enable their meaningful contributions to the city's development, it is imperative to comprehensively handle these difficulties, thereby alleviating the potential financial burdens they may encounter. In addition, offering assistance to immigrants through language instruction, job prospects, and initiatives promoting social integration might facilitate their adjustment to unfamiliar surroundings and surmount obstacles. Ultimately, the cultivation of a more comprehensive and encouraging community can contribute to the establishment of a sense of acceptance and appreciation among immigrants, a factor that holds significant importance for their overall welfare and sustained achievements within the urban environment. In order to effectively tackle the obstacles encountered by immigrants in Shenzhen and foster a city that is both accessible

and inclusive for all residents, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses government regulations, private sector endeavors, and community assistance.

5. Conclusion

The immigrant community's diverse backgrounds, creative ability, and ambition helped Shenzhen become a global center of innovation and cultural variety. This change has faced several challenges, including high housing and school costs that have prevented many immigrants from getting involved. These barriers prevent them from fully assimilating into society and from contributing to the city's growth. Even though these challenges are large, they can be overcome with dedicated effort. Managing these issues requires government legislation, private-sector collaboration, and community support. Increased affordable housing, education funding, hukou registration simplification, and language instruction and social integration programs can make Shenzhen more inclusive and accessible for all. Comprehensively tackling these issues will improve immigrants' quality of life and contribute to the city's sustainable development and social cohesion. The significance of this study transcends its focus on Shenzhen. The lessons learned and the strategies proposed can serve as guiding standards for other cities in China and globally. Shenzhen's story provides a unique blueprint for urban centers grappling with the complexities of immigration. However, it's crucial to remember that while Shenzhen provides many lessons, each city is unique, and solutions must be tailored to specific contexts. There are still nuances and intricacies of the Shenzhen immigration narrative yet to be explored. It is hoped that future scholars will delve deeper into these aspects, building on the foundation laid by this research, to continue unraveling the multifaceted tapestry of urban immigration and its impacts on the development of global metropolises.

References

[1] FU Caiwu,WANG Xingxing. The cultural "follow-up-lead" paradigm of emerging immigrant urban development:Shenzhen narrative. Journal of Shandong University(Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2021(01): 18-34.

[2] LIN Xiaozhao. The latest top ten cities with net population inflow: Shenzhen ranks first and two cities in the central and western regions are listed. CBN Daily, 2021, (A06).

[3] HE Yong,PENG Xiaorong,QIN Huifeng. Strive to create a "Shenzhen benchmark" for high-quality development. Shenzhen Special Zone News, 2023, (A05).

[4] WEN Kun. Shenzhen becomes a "magnet" for global young scientific and technological talents. Shenzhen Special Zone News, 2023, (A01).

[5] YANG Mingzhe. Research on the communicability of urban slogans from the perspective of urban communication. Soochow University, 2021.

[6] LIU Zhishan. Research on cultural motivation of the rapid development of migrant cities in contemporary China. Research on Cultural Soft Power, 2019, 4(02): 63-68.

[7] Wenyi Zhang. (2023). Sale price of residential real estate in 35 large and medium-sized cities in China in 2021. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/243404/sale-price-of-residential-real-estate-in-china/.

[8] Song Ding. What is the housing price-to-income ratio in Shenzhen. Special Economic Zone Economy, 2020, (03): 58.

[9] CHEN Shiying. Research on housing security of new youth in large cities in China: Taking Shenzhen as an example. Shanghai Real Estate, 2023, (01): 41-45.

[10] SUN Lei, ZHANG Daijun. Analysis and research on supply of residential market in major cities in China. Housing and Real Estate, 2019, (36): 3-4+7.

[11] Zhou Jinxia. Research on the structure, problems and countermeasures of new immigrant groups in Shenzhen. Journal of Guangdong Institute of Petrochemical Technology, 2020, 30(05): 47-50+55.