



EDITORIAL

大公社評

中文基本功

Three weak links in HK population must not be overlooked

The 2011 Population Census, released yesterday by the SAR Government's Census & Statistics Department, provides the latest data on Hong Kong's population, age distribution, sex ratio, marital status, educational level, occupation distribution, family structure and tenure accommodation of households, showing their changes over the past decade.

The government takes a population census every few years to collect the information necessary for formulation of social policies and distributing public resources, including housing, education, transport, medical care and social services. The importance of population census is thus beyond question. Generally speaking, results of past population censuses have been accurate and social planning formulations have been in keeping with them. There have been no serious deviations or errors. Still, "falling behind" sometimes seems inevitable.

In this regard, the most illustrative example must be the cropping up of the problem of so-called "killing schools" (forcing schools to close down) because of the continuous drop in the number of school-age children in recent years. For one thing, to keep schools running there must be continuity. A school cannot be opened one day and then suddenly closed the next. Closing down a school needs cooperation of the school-running organization(s). "Surplus" teachers must be re-allocated. But, lately, the problem seems to have turned the corner. Many children born in Hong Kong to Mainland parents who are not Hong Kong residents are now at their school-starting age and, arranged by their parents, coming to attend school in Hong Kong. Suddenly, "fresh troops" are joining the army of Hong Kong's school-age children. As a result, there is no need to "kill schools" and teachers can continue working. Places in schools in the North District of the New Territories even become insufficient to meet growing demand.

Such changes were not anticipated by the Census & Statistics Department. This shows that, after all, results of surveys and statistics just form a basic foundation for formulating relevant policies and measures which, however, must be adjusted in accordance with changes in circumstances.

The results of the latest census as released yesterday not only raise certain difficult problems for future policy makers, but also call for attention and concern of the general public. These results show three major changes.

One is that the population is ageing - the median age rose from 36.7 in 2001 to 41.7 last year. In other words, over the past decade, an average "Hongkonger" has become five years "older", bidding farewell to his youth to enter his middle age!

The second is that there are even more females than males. Ten years ago, there were 960 males per 1,000 females, but this has dropped to 876 per 1,000 in 2011.

The third is that people tend to get married at an older age, despite there being more and more women. Amongst men of marriageable age (between 20 and 49), 46.8% remained unmarried last year, up from 39% a decade ago. The ratio for unmarried women rose to 38.9% from 34%.

These three fundamental changes - population ageing, fewer men and

fewer marriages - speak for themselves about what changes they will bring to the development of Hong Kong society, economy and other aspects. Among others, population ageing surely deserves most concern. By 2035, one out of every four Hongkongers will be aged 65 and above. In other words, by then there will be a shortage of labour. A young person may need to look after six elderly people: his parents and their parents, and the burden of public health care will become even more overloaded.

Therefore, in face of the latest population statistics, the SAR Government must - as quickly as possible - conduct a review and draw up a comprehensive population policy, including raising the child allowance for tax deduction to encourage marriage, providing greater home mortgage interest deductions to encourage young people to get married, speeding up the launch of a universal medical insurance scheme, seriously considering setting up a universal retirement protection scheme, and allocating more resources to provide more nursing-home places and enhance home and community care services for the elderly. On the other hand, the results of the latest census give us a new perspective to view the problem of influx of pregnant Mainland women to give birth in Hong Kong, which has caused an uproar in society recently. We are getting "old", so it may not be a bad thing for some new blood to be injected into our society. With good planning and arrangements, babies born in Hong Kong to non-resident parents could be a blessing to our society. One may look at Japan and some other North European countries with ageing populations; they are more than happy to welcome other people to come to deliver babies or to settle down.

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WORDS AND USAGE

- 1 Fall behind (phrasal verb) - To fail to do something fast enough or on time. (落後, 滯後)
Examples: 1. I was ill for a week and fell behind with my work. 2. He fell behind when we were climbing the mountain.
2 Crop up (phrasal verb) - To appear when it is not expected; to happen suddenly. ((問題等)突然出現, 意外發生)
Examples: 1. I can't make it tonight - something has cropped up. 2. Some new problems cropped up at the last minute.
3 Turn the corner (idiom) - If something or someone turns the corner, their situation starts to improve after a difficult period. (轉危為安)
Examples: 1. Certainly, the company's been through difficult times but I think we can safely say that we have now turned the corner. 2. I was really ill on Tuesday and Wednesday but I think I've finally turned the corner.
4 Speak for itself/themselves (idiom) - If something speaks for itself, it does not need any explanation. (不言而喻)
Examples: 1. I'm not going to talk about our business successes. I think the report speaks for itself. 2. The expressions on their faces spoke for themselves: they hated the show.
5 Draw sth up (phrasal verb) - To make or write something that needs careful thinking. (制訂, 擬訂)
Examples: 1. Clear guidelines need to be drawn up. 2. My solicitor is drawing up the contract.

中文第一人稱字例甚多但不容與第三人稱混淆

二月十日晚上,商業電台《光明頂》節目主持人,引日報一份「澄清」啟事,指出有人把自己稱為「他」,啟事最後簽上自己的姓名,顯得啟事的第一人稱(我)與第三人稱(他)混淆。另一主持人(現在可能已變成嘉賓)則謂,美國也有類似情況。第一主持人堅持外國有,中國不必學。我也認為,三種人稱(我、你、他)即在英文(也用於美國),也是分得一清二楚的。那位仁兄的「澄清」啟事的人稱用法,不論中英文都是錯誤的;尤其是中文,絕不容許!

只聽得主持人說「今晚在電台說了,明天他可能又澄清了……」我沒有再聽下去,只是想時下港人用中文,即使知名人士,也用得馬馬虎虎。但一個人自稱為「他」,我現在才「大開眼界」。是否香港回歸了,中文反而而不注重?也許這是個別例子吧?

這個節目還未播完,就有朋友來電告知,他也聽到這件趣事。我問他有何感想。他說:第一人稱,可用的字不少,除了我,還有吾、余、予、愚、僕……任何一個字都可以;你要用兩個字亦無不可,如在下、鄙人、小人、本人,不佞等等,可以任擇;你做官,可以自稱本官,做元帥,可以自稱本帥,怎麼也不會用到「他」字吧!

我聽到這裡便取笑他:「你這麼大官癮,不如發個皇帝夢,自稱為朕吧!」只聽得對方應聲曰:今天雖無人敢於稱朕,稱孤家、寡人的倒不少,殊可不必借助於第三人稱,用到他字!

話說回來,我、你、他三種人稱,一般學童應該已經記熟了。寫得「澄清」啟事,起碼也是成年人。可能太多「澄清」,忙中有錯!

容若

觸景立畫

海岸風情畫



站在風情海岸邊,吹着絲絲海風,看到白雲像是眷戀着海洋,想要海天相連,但可惡的沙灘卻延伸出來!

青苑

港人口三大弱項不可忽視

特區政府統計處昨日發表二〇一一年香港人口普查報告,內容涵蓋人口總數及年齡組別、男女比例、婚姻狀況、教育程度、行業分布、家庭結構及居住地區等方面過去十年間的變化和最新的數據。



統計處公布的最新人口數據,有助港府檢討和重新制訂整體人口政策

政府每隔若干年就要進行一次人口普查,目的是為制訂一系列的社會政策以及公共資源分配找尋依據,包括房屋、教育、交通、醫療、社會服務等,其重要性當然不容置疑。本港過去歷次大型人口普查的結果,以及據之而制訂的各項社會規劃,總體上是準確和融合的,未至於出現重大的偏差與失誤,但一些「落差」仍難避免。

其中最明顯的例子莫過於適齡學童人數持續下降而導致所謂「殺校」問題的出現,一來辦學是有延續性的,不能說開辦就開辦、說停辦就停辦,需要辦學團體方面的配合,還要替「多餘」的教師找出路。但問題近年卻又出現「峰迴路轉」的變化,大批非本地孕婦生產的孩子已經到了入學年齡,家人安排他們由內地來港上學,一下子,本港的適齡學童隊伍多了一批「生力軍」,學校可以不「殺」、教師工作也有着落了,新界北地區學校的學位更供不應求。

這種變化,也是統計處始料所不及的。事態亦說明調查統計所得始終只能是一種基本依據,具體政策和措施還需要根據情況變化而及時作出調整。

昨日統計處發表的最新人口普查結果,不僅對未來的政策制訂者提出了不少難題,對市民大眾來說也有不少值得關注和思考之處。普查結果有三大變化:

一是老了——本港人口年齡中位數由二〇〇一年的三十六點七

歲,上升至去年的四十一點七歲,也就是說,過去十年間,「香港人」總體「老」了五歲,而且由「後生仔」步入了「哀樂中年」!

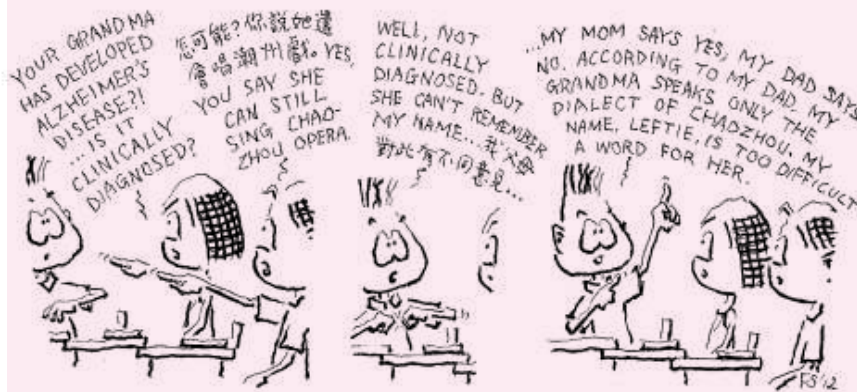
二是男的更少了、女的更多了。十年前,每出生一千名女性就有九百六十名男性,去年,後者降至八百七十六名。

三是「陰盛陽衰」的同時,「男的不願娶、女的不想嫁」,適婚年齡組別(二十至四十九歲)的未婚率,男的由十年前的百分之三十九增加至百分之四十六點八,女的由百分之三十四上升至百分之三十八點九。

此三點基本變化:人口老了、男的少了、婚姻弱了,對本港社會、經濟和其他方面的發展會帶來什麼改變,是不言而喻的。其中,人口老化當然最值得關注:到二〇三五年,每四個港人中,就有一個年在六十五歲或以上。也就是說,到時本港勞動力供應不足,一名年輕人可能要面對六位老人家:父母、祖父母、外祖父母……,公共醫療的負擔更會不勝負荷。

因此,在最新的人口普查數字面前,特區政府必須從速檢討和重新制訂整體人口政策,包括提高子女免稅額以鼓勵生育、提供更大的供樓稅務優惠來鼓勵年輕人結婚、加快推動全民醫療保險計劃、認真考慮設立全民退休保障金,以及增撥資源提供更多老人院舍宿位和老人家居支援……。而與此同時,人口普查結果也為近日鬧得沸沸揚揚的內地「雙非」孕婦來港產子問題提供了一個不同的思考方向:我們已經「老」了,有一些新鮮血液加入這個社會未必是一件壞事,只要事先作好規劃和安排,「雙非」嬰可能是港人之福。看看日本和北歐一些高齡人口國家,有人肯去生孩子落戶,歡迎還來不及呢。 2012/02/22 大公報社評

SOHO DIARY



Language Skill and Memory (2)

Hark Yeung (yeung@harkyeung.com)

After reading the news story about language skill and memory, I talked to a friend who is being regarded by many as one of the best writers in Hong Kong. We discussed whether Hong Kong people who are bilingual could have less memory problems when they are eighty years old and whether some training in languages for the elderly could sharpen their brains.

It would be wonderful if someone could do a research on the relation between bilingualism and brain development, especially on Chinese-English bilingualism. Chinese-English bilingualism is obviously different from English-French bilingualism because Chinese characters are so different from the letters of western languages.

In Hong Kong, there are a lot of discussions about the standard of people's Chinese and English, but there are not enough discussions on how the two languages affect the overall learning

abilities of local students. From time to time, there is some sort of outcry in Hong Kong advocating the use of mother tongue (母語) as the medium of teaching and learning. Yet I have not seen any convincing study showing that using only one language can make people's brains work better.

A few days ago, I read another news story about eating less twice a week can help protect against brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's (帕金森症). The research is done by the National Institute on Ageing in Baltimore in the United States. Research results show that stopping food intake for a day or two a week is good for the brain.

Does that mean eating less from time to time can also enhance the language skill of a person? Perhaps we need to do more such researches before we decide what kind of bilingualism Hong Kong needs.

通識記憶體

港人平均結婚年齡 較10年前遲1年

根據政府日前公布2011年人口普查的簡要報告,可以看到香港男女人口老化愈見明顯:

Table with 4 columns: Category, 2001, 2006, 2011. Rows include Male Population and Male Age Groups (25-44, 45-64, 65+).

Table with 4 columns: Category, 2001, 2006, 2011. Rows include Female Population and Female Age Groups (25-44, 45-64, 65+).

普查除了顯示男女比例進一步失衡,適婚年齡組別(20至49歲)從未結婚的百分比亦分別上升了7.5及4.9個百分比;男女離婚率亦分別由2001年的2.1及3.3%,上升至2011年的2.7%及4.9%。不過,在最近5年這方面的增加卻有所放緩。2011年的男女平均結婚年齡分別是31.1歲及28.8歲,比10年前遲結婚超過1年。 (*在2011年人口普查時,「離婚」及「分居」是一起統計) 資料來源:香港政府2011年人口普查簡要報告