



# Yet to Settle

by Belle Frejillana Ramirez and Corina Cheung

Twelve years after Hong Kong's handover to the People's Republic of China, the number of mainlanders coming to Hong Kong for study and career purposes has risen dramatically. Yet it seems that not many of them are determined to settle down here.

Zhang Ping, a former star of the national women's volleyball team, is currently studying for her bachelor's degree in Physical Education and Sports Science at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

She was forced to retire from the team because of knee injuries after helping China strike gold in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Afterwards, Miss Zhang could have chosen to study in the U.S., but instead, she chose to come to Hong Kong under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS). She arrived in August this year.

The scheme was introduced in 2006. According to the Immigration Department, its aim is to attract highly

skilled or talented people to settle in Hong Kong to enhance Hong Kong's economic competitiveness in the global market. By the end of last year, 886 out of 2,572 applicants had been granted entry to Hong Kong. Most of them came from mainland China.

Miss Zhang said Hong Kong offered advantages for her over the U.S. "I decided to come to Hong Kong because I can still learn English in



Zhang Ping (middle) left the national women's volleyball team after the 2004 Olympic Games.

COURTESY OF ZHANG PING

Hong Kong. And I don't have to worry about the language barrier since I can communicate in Mandarin here," said the towering 1.87 metre-tall athlete.

As a young girl, Miss Zhang never received a regular education due to her athletic career. After retirement, she studied at the Tianjin Polytechnic University for three years, but she did not want to stop at that.

"I wanted to go out to see more and to learn English," she said.

English is not the only thing Miss Zhang is learning in Hong Kong. "I have to learn anatomy, statistics, sports foundation... All that I have never learnt before," she said.

It has been a struggle trying to learn so many different subjects but she is lucky to have helping hands around. "All my classmates are friendly and caring. They take the initiative to ask if I need assistance with school work," said Miss Zhang. "We also hang out together. I treasure the friends I have made here a lot."

Generally, she thinks that Hong Kong people are nice and helpful.

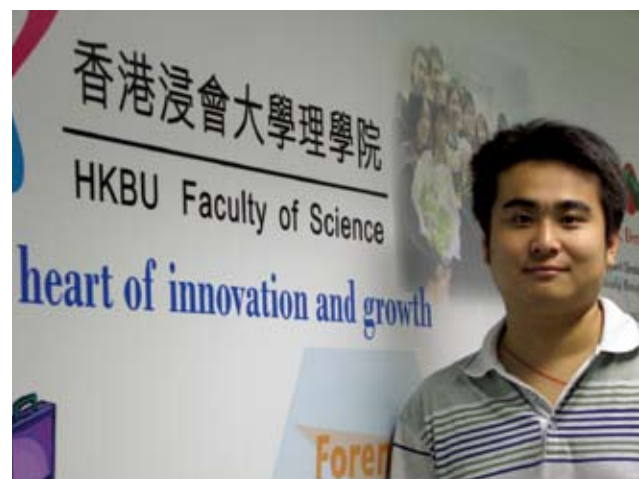
Yet, when asked whether she will stay in Hong Kong after graduation, the 27-year-old hesitated. "Well, I am not sure," she said. "I may go abroad or go back to mainland China. It depends on how things are going."

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While Miss Zhang is hesitant, Andy Cai Chunhui is clear he plans to leave Hong Kong after graduation at the end of this year. Mr Cai is a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) candidate at the Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). He majors in Physics but is working on biological studies which are more advanced in Western countries.

"One possible option is to continue my research career, which means I may have to go abroad, to America, Europe, for a couple of years of post-doctorate and meet people who are breaking frontiers," he said.

The 26-year-old said his other option is to start a biological or medical business in mainland China. When



Andy Cai Chunhui wants to leave Hong Kong for study abroad or to develop a biomedical business in mainland China after graduation.

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asked why he would choose to start his business in mainland China over Hong Kong, he said, "The main focus of Hong Kong is not really on science and the grant that you can get is limited but in (mainland) China, things will be different."

What makes it different is that the biomedical industry in China is not as well developed as in Europe and there will be a very big potential market, said Mr Cai. "So the government will be willing to invest in this field. I want to delve into this business and work with the government," he added.

Even as he maps out his departure from Hong Kong, Mr Cai still sees himself as half a Hong Konger, half a mainlander. After all, he has lived here for eight years, studying first for his bachelor's and then master's degree. Throughout those years, he has noticed the number of mainland students in Hong Kong constantly increasing.

"When I first got here, I wasn't very used to the living style – the food, accommodation – and people here usually sleep very late. Now, I have actually blended in and I love it," he said. "Everything is nice – the policy, efficiency... All are impressive."

Mr Cai shared his experience with *Varsity* in relaxed and fluent English. He attributed it to the daily conversations

he had with his Canadian roommate when he was an undergraduate student.

But studying in Hong Kong has given him more than improved English skills. "One of the advantages in Hong Kong is that you can meet all kinds of people from different cities so that you can have a lot of connections," he said.

Mr Cai will not be the only mainland talent to leave Hong Kong. Li Jianxin, a mainland shadow artist who also came to Hong Kong under the QMAS, said he knew of many quality migrants who had returned to mainland China after coming to Hong Kong for a short period.

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Mr Li, who came here at the end of 2007, attempted to explain the departures. "Under the system of public ownership in mainland China, there is a national department to take care of our living and work," said the 52-year-old artist.

Hong Kong has a different system. "People don't know about it. They cannot adapt to living in Hong Kong,"



Li Jianxin demonstrates the silhouette of a human head with his hands.

COURTESY OF LI JIANXIN





COURTESY OF LI JIANXIN

Li Jianxin shows his skills in shadow arts with his puppet, which can “exhale” smoke, blow flames and perform other tasks of high difficulty.

he said.

When asked whether he would encourage mainland talents to come to Hong Kong through the scheme, Mr Li said “no”, without hesitation. “The reason is that Hong Kong is a cruel place to stay. You cannot survive if you do not have creativity,” he added.

Mr Li recalled that when he first came to Hong Kong after being granted residency he had no idea where to seek help on “where and how to get medical services, social security, and who I can approach to help me with my career”.

After two years of living here, he has solved these problems, not because of support and assistance from the government, but through the help of his friends in Hong Kong.

“I think that the Hong Kong government lacks humanistic caring in the aspect of talent recruiting,” he said. “There is no assistance after their arrival in Hong Kong,” he added.

Despite this, Mr Li has never thought of leaving Hong Kong. “The best thing about Hong Kong is that there are no complicated interpersonal relationships like in the mainland,” he said. “I will never fail if I am capable.”

Mr Li also intends to stay because he finds more room for artistic creation in the multicultural city. He had practiced

shadow play (*pi ying xi*), which involves manipulating figures and puppets in front of illuminated backdrops to create illusions of moving images, in Hunan Province for 37 years.

“In the mainland, everyone specialises in one, or at most, two techniques of shadow play,” said Mr Li. He was not satisfied and he wanted to try something new and of his own style in Hong Kong. He thinks residents here might be more receptive to new forms of art.

“What I am going to do here is to combine the use of puppets, hands and light in shadow play and transform it into a unique type of performance – one that only exists in Hong Kong,” said Mr Li.

Mr Li’s observation that Hong Kong provides more room for creation is echoed by Chen Houfu, the first interior designer admitted by the QMAS in 2008. “In the field of design, Hong Kong is always a place we yearn for. The industry is far more sophisticated than in the mainland,” he said. “Hong Kong also provides me with a platform for information to connect with the outer world,” he added.

Mr Chen founded Holf Design & Consultant Co., Ltd in Shenzhen in 1997 and set up an office in Hong Kong

after getting his Hong Kong ID card. He does not have any projects in Hong Kong but has been travelling between Shenzhen and Hong Kong frequently for seminars and exhibitions.

“The office in Hong Kong is mainly for connection purposes now but we also want to develop our business in Hong Kong in the future,” he said. However, business in Hong Kong is only part of his plan. “The market in mainland China is much bigger than in Hong Kong. We do not want to restrict our future development to be in Hong Kong only,” he added.

There have been more Hong Kong investors who have projects in mainland China in recent years and they hire design firms in Hong Kong to follow up the projects, according to Mr Chen. “Usually, they cannot do a good job because of poor communication and difference in thinking with mainlanders,” he said.

Mr Chen’s understanding of both cultures gives him an edge in his industry. He wants to explore cooperation with Hong Kong investors on mainland projects. “We can serve as a bridge between Hong Kong and China, to let Hong Kong designers understand mainlanders’ way of thinking and to let mainlanders learn from the professionalism of Hong Kong designers,” he said. ▣



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Chen Houfu does not want to restrict the development of his design to Hong Kong only.