

COMMENTHK

Approaches needed to meet SAR's talent requirements

Tu Haiming says both affordable housing and a better living environment would help attract professionals and enterprises

The results of the talent attraction programs launched by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government have been promising so far. As of June, half a year following their introduction, the SAR government had received more than 100,000 applications, almost three times the annual target to import 35,000 professionals. The overwhelming response is a testimony to Hong Kong's allure.

The Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) was launched by the incumbent administration shortly after its inauguration, with the aim of addressing the recent brain drain problem bottlenecking Hong Kong's development. Since Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland resumed quarantine-free travel in January, the SAR government has stepped up efforts in its quest for global talent. The unexpectedly high turnout is like a shot in the arm.

The TTPS is a core initiative in Hong Kong's drive to attract talent. As of the end of May, more than 32,000 individuals had applied for TTPS admission, of whom more than 21,000 have been approved. Most of the applicants are from the Chinese mainland, and individuals aged 18 to 30 form the largest group. Among the categories of applicants, B-tier talent, people who have obtained a bachelor's degree from any of the world's top 100 universities and have accumulated at least three years' work experience in the five years prior to application, make up most of the candidates. Combined with the admissions under other talent programs, total talent admissions in the first five months of this year reached 49,000, exceeding the annual target of 35,000.

These figures attest to Hong Kong's attraction for professionals. In particular, Hong Kong boasts distinctive advantages in three areas.

First, Hong Kong is a highly internationalized city and a melting pot of elites from all over the world. Many of the world's top 500 companies have stationed their Asia-Pacific headquarters in the city. In the minds of a lot of young professionals, Hong Kong is a gold mine of opportunities and provides a world-class entrepreneurial platform.



Tu Haiming
The author is vice-chairman of the Committee on Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and chairman of the Hong Kong New Era Development Thinktank.

The second advantage is Hong Kong's superior business environment. Thanks to its status as a free port, the city's economic vitality is beyond comparison. Many aspiring young individuals consider employment in Hong Kong as a step onto a career path without limits.

The third advantage is the privileged identity of Hong Kong permanent residency, which grants the passport holder visa-free access to 168 countries and regions worldwide, lower academic requirements for admission to prestigious schools, more medical subsidies, and a tax ceiling of 15 percent, all of which are enticing perks for potential residents of all ages.

Some crude propaganda intended to malign the National Security Law for Hong Kong (NSL), has claimed that its promulgation has weakened the city's attractiveness to global professionals. The falsity of such a claim is now exposed by the overwhelming response to the TTPS and other talent admission programs. Indeed, the NSL has no impact on law-abiding residents, whose work and life in Hong Kong has not been affected or disturbed in any sense.

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu recently disclosed that the SAR government is preparing to further relax the requirements for talent admission, suggesting there is still a large talent gap.

As Hong Kong's economy rebounded in the wake of the three-year pandemic, the city suddenly found itself grappling with a talent crunch, especially in the aviation and construction sectors. Meanwhile, the national 14th Five Year Plan (2021-25) designated Hong Kong's role as "eight centers": international financial

center; international innovation and technology center; international cultural exchange center; international trade center; international shipping center; international aviation hub; center for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region; and regional intellectual property trading center. All these developments require a lot of professionals.

While stepping up its efforts to attract professionals, Hong Kong must also strive to retain them. The provision of affordable housing remains a top priority in this regard as the city's exorbitant house prices remain a prime discouragement to professionals.

Besides, there is room for improvement of the city's living environment, with the inordinately high population density of central urban areas being a case in point. Hopefully, the development of the Northern Metropolis will help divert some residents from central urban areas. Hong Kong should also step up its cooperation with Guangdong province to bring the "one-hour living circle" in the Greater Bay Area to fruition, and jointly develop a "cultural bay area" to create a more livable environment that will increase Hong Kong's appeal to global professionals.

In his maiden Policy Address last October, John Lee announced the launch of the Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises, followed by the establishment of the Co-Investment Fund of HK\$30 billion (\$3.8 billion) to support firms. It is expected that the government will also provide support in the areas of land and human resources.

The government aims to get at least 1,130 companies to set up or expand their businesses in Hong Kong between 2023 and 2025. Around 186 companies have already set foot in Hong Kong this year.

Without the necessary professionals, it will be difficult to revive Hong Kong's industries; without distinguished enterprises, it is difficult to retain professionals. Therefore, the hunt for talent has to go hand-in-hand with the quest for world-class enterprises.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



David Cottam
The author is a British historian and former principal of Sha Tin College, Hong Kong.

Electric-car report has UK paranoid about espionage

China "will use electric cars to spy on Britain", according to a headline in Britain's The Telegraph on Aug 5. Similar reports also appeared in other British newspapers, all quoting government sources. It seems that despite recent encouraging moves to improve Sino-British relations, government paranoia about China is still alive and well.

According to the Telegraph report, British ministers have warned that imports of electric cars from China "will enable Beijing to spy on British citizens". The article goes on to say that "China is predicted to dominate the UK market because of its prowess in providing cheap electric cars." It then references unnamed sources "at the heart of government" who "have raised concerns that technology embedded in the vehicles could be used to harvest huge amounts of information, including location data, audio recordings and video footage".

After reading this, I immediately checked the date of the article, wondering whether it was a reprint from the April 1 edition; but no, this wasn't the sort of joke known as an April Fool that's traditional in Britain on the first of that month. Are we really expected to believe that Beijing is interested in listening to all the mundane conversations, squabbles, romances and children's chatter that go on in the millions of vehicles on British roads, in the vague hope of catching a fragment of intelligence that may or may not be useful, relevant, or even accurate? If Chinese agents have nothing better to do than eavesdrop on random British car conversations, then the West has absolutely nothing to fear from them.

So what is the background to this type of government spy paranoia and media interest? We all know that in the West, spying is part of popular culture, and that a good spy story will always attract readers. The electric-car spy story is only the latest in a string of headlines about alleged Chinese spying ingenuity. Other media stories in the past year have included accusations about Chinese spy balloons, streetlights, televisions, cameras, drones, telecom equipment, and even (don't laugh) refrigerators. Is the West simply suffering from a bad case of paranoia, or has the popularity of James Bond morphed fact and fiction so that the two are now indistinguishable?

It's certainly undeniable that spying goes on all around the world. Indeed, it is as old as civilization itself. In the fifth century BC, in his military text *The Art of War*, the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu wrote: "Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other men; hence the use of spies." In addition to Imperial China, spy networks were also well-established in Ancient Egypt and in the Greek, Roman and Mongol empires. Indeed, throughout history, espionage has been an integral part of international relations, defense and diplomacy. All countries do it; all countries need to know about potential threats from potential enemies.

One of the most famous early English spymasters was Sir Francis Walsingham, the principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth I. His sophisticated network of secret agents across Europe was a model of espionage that was rapidly copied by other European powers in the second half of the 16th century. By the time of the Napoleonic Wars at the start of the 19th century, public awareness and fear of foreign spies was endemic. According to legend, this led to a strange incident in Hartlepool in northeast England, where local people are said to have hanged a shipwrecked monkey, believing him to have been a French spy.

In the 20th century, espionage played a key role in both world wars, with all participants perfecting sophisticated intelligence-gathering systems. This was reflected in popular culture, with spy novels emerging as an era-defining genre. Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) and John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) were early classics. As the century wore on and Cold War espionage between the West and Soviet Russia took center stage, spy novels proliferated. Ian Fleming's James Bond became the archetypal spy hero, with Fleming's 12 Bond novels, two short-story collections, and the subsequent movie franchise putting Cold War espionage front and center in the West's psyche. Other influential novels in the genre included works by Graham Greene (*The Quiet American*), John Le Carre (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*), and Len Deighton (*The Ipcress File*).

In America, spying had previously played an important role in both the Revolutionary War (1775-83) and the US Civil War (1861-65), but it was not until the second half of the 20th century that the US became a world leader in espionage and counterespionage techniques. Inspired not by James Bond but by the British Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, the US rapidly became the world's most sophisticated spying machine. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was established in 1947. Its mission then, as now, was to strengthen America's defense and security by gaining as much intelligence as possible about the actions, facilities and intentions of potential adversaries. In other words, along with the rest of the world, the US has followed the ancient advice and wisdom of Sun Tzu.

In short, all of the world's secret agencies are involved in espionage. As Sun Tzu pointed out, it would be irresponsible not to do so. Indeed, it can be argued that espionage helps preserve peace in the world. After all, the more information that governments have about the military capabilities of other countries and their allies, the less likely they are to risk attacking those countries. In this context, Vladimir Putin must be wishing that his secret agents had done a better job in reporting to him not only the military preparedness of Ukraine but also the willingness of Western governments to support Ukrainian forces. Had Russian espionage been more effective, the present conflict could well have been avoided.

Of course, the importance of spying in international relations will never be acknowledged. Governments will never want to admit to covert operations, despite the operations' critical importance to security. Equally, whenever governments claim that other countries are spying on them, they and the media get wildly excited. The country allegedly being spied upon denounces the offending actions as an outrage, despite the fact that they are doing exactly the same thing to the offending country. This is pure hypocrisy, but is all part of a well-understood and secretive game.

However, accusations about spying really need to be credible if the accusers aren't to become a laughingstock. The latest British claims about Chinese electric-car espionage are straight out of the anti-China playbook and are so ridiculous that even a James Bond movie wouldn't come up with such a nonsensical plot.

There's a popular children's game called "I spy", in which you have to guess something beginning with a certain letter. If you really are deluded enough to believe in Chinese electric car espionage, this is a perfect game for car travel: "I spy with my little eye something beginning with 'P'." The answer, of course, is "paranoia".

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

2023 POLICY ADDRESS

Improving HK's mental well-being status in 2023 PA

The consultation sessions for the 2023 Policy Address arranged by the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have spurred discussion among professionals on the best way to address the public's concerns over the city's mental well-being and the proposed solutions. Improving the psychological well-being of citizens is a daunting and challenging task, calling for the involvement and commitment of social and economic sectors, families and communities.

Extensive consultation is necessary and commendable; over 30 consultation sessions with Legislative Council members, representatives of various concerned groups, and the general public will be highly informative for policymakers. The dedication of Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu and his administrative team demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing public concerns for the welfare of the citizens.

The recent roll-out of 10 measures to promote mental health support is a significant step forward. The measures recognize the importance of addressing the needs of individuals recovering from severe mental illness and promoting overall mental wellness. Some further refinements will help achieve the goal through a comprehensive and effective approach.

By increasing the ratio of case managers to severe mental health patients (1:40), the government is ensuring that individuals receive sufficient personalized attention and care tailored to their specific needs. A well-designed training plan will be needed to ensure that prospective case managers are fully equipped with essential skills, including effective communication, crisis intervention, and long-term support. By doing so, a satisfactory outcome and a more efficient mental health care system can be forged for the foreseeable future.

New medications with fewer side-effects are a promising step toward improving patient well-being. To bolster this initiative, it's advisable to promote a shared decision-making model between healthcare providers and patients. Engaging patients in medication discussions



Lau Kin-shing
The author is vice-president of the Hong Kong Psychological, Counselling and Consultation Society, an international certified hypnotherapist instructor, and a senior Chinese psychological counselor and course instructor.

and keeping them informed about potential side-effects will enhance treatment adherence and empower patients to manage their own health.

Waiting times for psychiatric specialist consultations need to be reduced to ensure early intervention and timely treatment. To further reinforce this goal, establishing a robust telehealth infrastructure could provide virtual access to mental health professionals, ensuring immediate support, especially in urgent cases.

Exploring the feasibility of "community treatment orders" is important, but it's equally critical to ensure that the rights and autonomy of patients are upheld. A robust oversight mechanism involving patient advocates, legal experts, and mental health professionals can strike a balance between treatment and individual rights.

The commitment to offering specialized support for marginalized groups could include targeted outreach programs, culturally sensitive mental health education, and bilingual services for ethnic minorities. Collaborating with community leaders and local influencers can facilitate trust-building and destigmatization.

In addition, family issues in Hong Kong should not be overlooked. The fast-paced and highly competitive lifestyle is stressful for everyone, especially the working population who put in long hours and juggle multiple responsibilities to meet the ever-rising cost of living. This situation affects both the quality and quantity of time spent with family members. The lack of a healthy work-life balance leads to a "burnout

mentality" that takes a toll on both mental and physical health and strains family relationships.

Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress are more prevalent in Hong Kong than the general public realizes. On top of which, such issues have been stigmatized in society, discouraging those in need from seeking help from their families. As a result, as family members are kept in the dark, mental health problems could escalate to an unmanageable stage before any effective action is taken.

Addressing family issues in Hong Kong requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account the changing dynamics within families, the impact of societal pressures, and the challenges posed by economic conditions. By implementing strategies to enhance work-life balance, promote mental health awareness, provide affordable housing solutions, reform the education system, and address economic inequalities, Hong Kong can promote healthier family relationships and create a more supportive environment for families to thrive.

The government could propose that employers organize wellness programs and initiatives focused on physical and mental health. This could include offering counseling services, stress management workshops, and recreational activities, fostering a work environment that recognizes the importance of work-life balance.

Through the recommendations put forth in the 2023 Policy Address, it is to be hoped that mental health services in Hong Kong can be enhanced. The government has the potential to establish a comprehensive and integrated mental health care system that not only addresses current concerns but also cultivates a culture of resilience and well-being. To further amplify the impact, the integration of robust monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement mechanisms should be considered to ensure the enduring effectiveness of these measures over the long term.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

