

# Hong Kong and GBA: Psychological Distance among Hong Kong Working Adults

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## Major Findings and Policy Implications

1. Psychological distance reduces intention of migrating to Greater Bay Area (GBA) cities in Mainland China;
2. Psychological distance can be shortened by promoting positive attitude toward GBA cities in Mainland China, reducing situational concerns, and a field visit;
3. Positive attitudes toward GBA cities in Mainland China promote migration intention both directly and indirectly, as mediated by situational concerns and experience of visiting Mainland GBA cities;
4. The impact of a positive attitude on a field visit was found to be weaker among wealthier adults; the effect of a field visit on migration intention was found to be stronger among wealthier adults;
5. Offering economic incentives alone cannot motivate working adults to work in GBA, but promoting social and emotional attachment through visits and exchanges would help.

2. The final sample consisted of 1,028 respondents, among whom 52.1% were male. The research team categorized the young adults into three income groups based on their self-reported monthly incomes: those with a monthly income of between 0 and 19,999 Hong Kong dollars (HKD) were grouped as low-income earners; those between HKD 20,000 and HKD 29,999 were grouped as middle-income earners; while those with a monthly income equal to or above HKD 30,000 were grouped as high-income earners. The relative numbers of low-, middle-, and high-income young adults were 41.9%, 30.9%, and 27.1%, respectively.

3. The research team measured positive attitude toward GBA cities in Mainland, situational concerns, experience of visiting Mainland GBA cities, intention to migrate to a Mainland GBA City and a series of sociodemographic variables.

## Key Policy Issues

1. Programs promoting the GBA plan, and policy support relevant to the plan, could be very successful if they were able to traverse three components of psychological distance experienced by Hong Kong residents.

2. Policy makers are suggested to manipulate three components of psychological distance in facilitating the decision of migrating to Mainland GBA cities, and particularly, shortening temporal distance by promoting confidence of development prospects of GBA.

3. Future policy should focus on addressing the spatial distance of high-income Hong Kong working adults by creating opportunities for them to visit Mainland GBA cities and encouraging exchange activities between Hong Kong and Mainland talents.

## Background

1. The research team commissioned an international survey firm Dynata to collect data from a sample of young adults in Hong Kong aged between 18 to 35 years between 25 March 2019 and 1 April 2019. Dynata adopted a random sampling method and selected / invited young adults from all eighteen local districts of Hong Kong to make up a ratio of participants from Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories that would be close to 2:3:5.

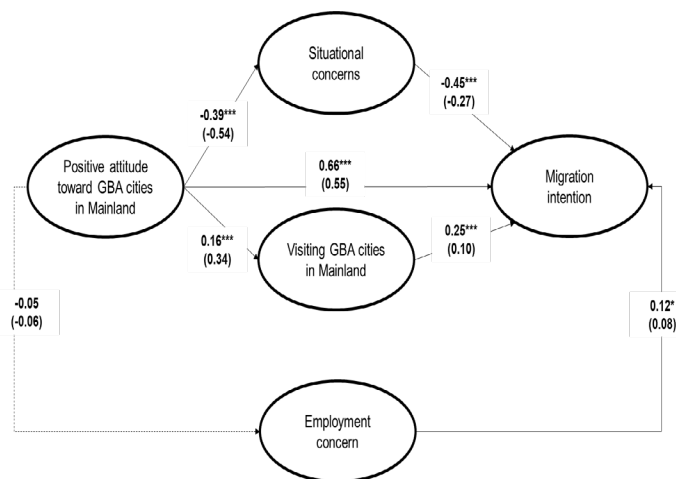
4. For high-income individuals, face-to-face interpersonal communication and practical knowledge acquired during the field visit creates an effective mediational pathway to connect positive attitude to migration intention, improve the influential power of positive attitude, and maximize the effect of GBA promotion programs that aim to promote positive attitude toward Mainland GBA cities.

### Psychological Distance and Migration Intention

The GBA Plan has been in place for less than two years, and it is anticipated that, in the future, this will materialize as an acceptable alternative for Hong Kong residents. Therefore, the Mainland GBA cities can be conceptualized as a temporally distant object. The border control between Mainland and Hong Kong creates a sense of spatial distance. In addition to the spatial distance, social distance resulting from the different institutional arrangements and lifestyles of the two regions is another important component of the psychological distance. Psychological distance inevitably reduces positivity, decreasing intention to migrate to a GBA city in Mainland.

To shorten the temporal distance, the Key should be promoting a positive attitude toward Mainland GBA cities, particularly positive attitudes toward their future and development prospects. A visit to a GBA city in Mainland helps decrease spatial distance. To shorten social distance, a series of situational concerns of Hong Kong working adults on Mainland economy, culture, and society must be addressed. Compared to situational concerns and visiting GBA cities, positive attitude seems to be more critical, as positive attitude may weaken situational concerns and increase the likelihood of a visit to a GBA city, both of which may thereafter promote migration intention. The present research echoes what other international studies has found, young adults' migration motivation across cities are highly dependent on their social links and emotional affiliation / attachment of the destination for migration.

As expected, the results based on the full sample indicate positive attitude toward Mainland GBA cities significantly reduced situational concerns ( $b = -0.54, p < 0.001$ ) and significantly promoted the likelihood of visiting GBA cities in Mainland ( $b = 0.34, p < 0.001$ ). At the next stage, situational concerns significantly reduced migration intention ( $b = -0.27, p < 0.001$ ), while visiting Mainland GBA cities significantly promoted it ( $b = 0.10, p < 0.001$ ). In addition, positive attitude was found to have a direct and positive effect on migration intention ( $b = 0.55, p < 0.001$ ). Unexpectedly, the results indicated positive attitude did not have significant effect on employment concerns ( $b = -0.06, p = 0.12$ ), and employment concerns significantly promoted migration intention ( $b = 0.08, p < 0.05$ ).



SEM Results in the Full Sample (N = 1028)

Note: Unstandardized and standardized (in parenthesis) estimates were reported.  $*** p < 0.001$ ,  $* p < 0.05$ .

### Associations between Psychological Distance and Migration Intention in Different Income Groups

#### Low-income Group vs. Middle-income Group

Among seven pathways, we only found a significant difference in the association between positive attitude and employment concerns. Among low-income working adults, positive attitude was able to significantly reduce employment concerns ( $B = -0.12, p < 0.05$ ), but the link was insignificant among the middle-income group ( $B = 0.05, p = 0.46$ ).

#### Low-income Group vs. High-income Group

We found significant differences in the link between positive attitude and visiting Mainland GBA cities, and in the link between visiting GBA cities in Mainland and migration intention. Visiting GBA cities could significantly mediate the link from positive attitude to migration intention in the high-income group ( $B = 0.10, p < 0.001; B = 0.45, p < 0.001$ ), but it was not an effective mediator in the same link in the low-income group ( $B = 0.18, p < 0.001; B = 0.15, p = 0.10$ ). The magnitude of the link from positive attitude to visiting GBA cities in the high-income group was 44.4% less than that in the low-income group. A visit could promote migration intention among the high-income group ( $B = 0.45, p < 0.001$ ), but not the low-income group ( $B = 0.15, p = 0.10$ ).

#### Middle-income Group vs. High-income Group

Among seven pathways, we only found a significant difference in the association between positive attitude and visiting Mainland GBA cities. Although the link was positive and significant in both the middle-income group ( $B = 0.19, p < 0.001$ ) and the high-income group ( $B = 0.10, p < 0.001$ ), the magnitude of the association in the high-income group was 47.4% less than that in the middle-income group.

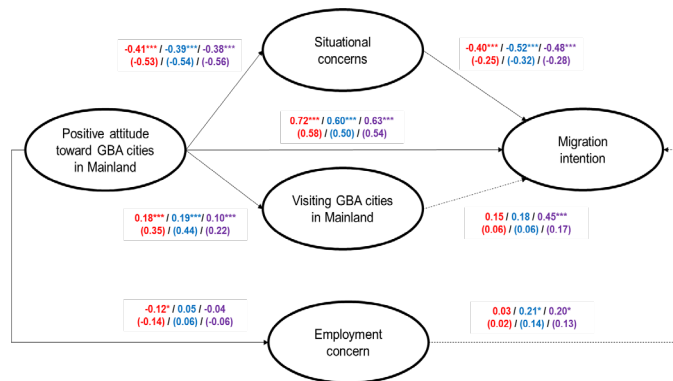


Figure 2  
SEM Results with Constrained Measurement Weights and Unconstrained Structural Weights in Different Income Groups.

Note: Unstandardized and standardized (in parenthesis) estimates were reported. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ . Red for low-income group; blue for middle-income group; purple for high-income group.