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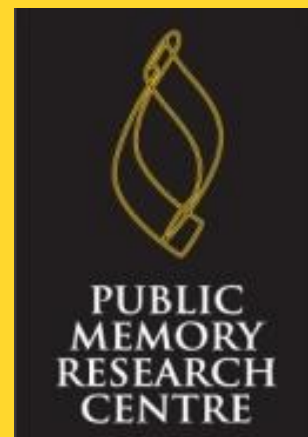
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Researching People Beyond the State: A Preliminary Study of German Expatriates in Hong Kong and Governance Performance

Thorsten Nieberg (Thorsten.Nieberg@usq.edu.au)

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, 4350, Australia.

Abstract

This paper provides some preliminary findings of ongoing research about German ‘expatriates’. Specifically, it offers some initial insights into the demographic profile of the German migrant population in Hong Kong and a generic discussion about their concerns and needs in terms of the German government. The paper draws on the author’s recent fieldwork research conducted in Hong Kong, including survey-questioning and interviewing. The paper begins with a few introductory remarks concerning the current state of, particularly, German migration research and an outline of the questions framing this paper as arising from the preceding considerations. This is followed by a short introduction of the materials and data collection methods behind the paper. The paper continues by presenting an early overview of the size and composition of the German expatriate population in Hong Kong. It then delves into some governance issues pertaining to them. A concluding section sums up the most important findings of this research to date.

Keywords

Composition, expatriates, Germany, governance, Hong Kong, migration research, profile

GERMANY AND PEOPLE BEYOND THE STATE

‘People beyond the state’—that is, persons residing in a country other than the one of their birth for varying reasons and periods of time—constitute a distinctive phenomenon in events of the present day. However, while the human movements behind such circumstances seem to be ‘more geographically extensive than the great global migrations of the modern [i.e., preceding] era’, they still appear to remain ‘on balance slightly *less* intensive [i.e., numerous]’ (Held et. al. 1999: 326, *italics* added in Brubaker 2005: 9).¹ Yet, one could argue that

¹ Today it is generally agreed that the total number of persons worldwide residing outside their country of birth for more than 12 months ‘is most likely in excess of 200 million’ (IOM 2008: 2). Some observers cite their number at around 230 million (see Esman 2009). While this total represents some

these social phenomena matter more today than ever before, not only because of their widening reach and greater immediacy, but also because of the enhanced acceleration and increased frequency with which they occur² and because of the aggregate impact of those factors on individual identity and collective organisational conflicts that can be linked to the movement of people across international borders.

Researching people beyond the state is specifically important because it firstly shows how distant components of a nation state’s society think about issues related to their belonging and security in the context of increasing human interactions worldwide. It also reveals the ability of state polities to address the needs of associated populations located outside their sovereign territory by taking into account the concerns held by the core community with a view to a similar set of questions. And, finally, it helps to define principles and forms of governance that are capable of dealing with the varying demands of these populations and their overall well-being, and to draw more general outlooks about human socialisation and especially about the role of states in such circumstances.

Academic research, to date, has dealt with people beyond the state and related issues largely in terms of ‘non-privileged migrants’ from developing countries; only fairly recently, has attention been shifted to include more ‘affluent movers from Western societies’ (Fechter 2007: 53), and such other analytic categories as ‘diaspora’ (see Cohen 2008;

two and a half times the figure of 76 million in 1960 (see IOM 2005: 379), it is still about the same percentage in terms of the world’s overall population—namely about 3 per cent—and apparently no more than in earlier times.

² A closer look at current developments in the field of more short-term movements and/or stays may underline this argument. It shows that the number of tourist arrivals worldwide has risen to a remarkable 850 million in 2006—up from around 440 million in 1990, and only 25 million in 1950 (see Wearing et. al. 2010: 3; IOM 2008: 129).

Safran 2005, 1991) and ‘transnationalism’ (see Pries 2008; Glick Schiller et. al. 1992). Since then, new criticism has emerged about these notions deeming them to be insufficient in comprehensively describing all migrants’ experiences (see Brubaker 2005; Castles & Miller 2003: 30). In addition, some Western countries, such as the Federal Republic of Germany (hereafter Germany), have remained relatively neglected in terms of both generic and, especially, more detailed academic research efforts (Sauer & Ette 2007: 5). So far, only limited statistical information has become available about the numbers, compositions, destinations, motivations and durations of German ventures abroad (see Dumont & Lemaître 2005; StBA 2009; Sauer & Ette 2007). Moreover, only a few researchers have delved very deeply into such issues as the evolving identities, attitudes and living conditions of specifically-located German communities and their individuals, such as in Indonesia, Singapore and England (see Fechter 2007; Meier 2009, 2006), not to mention their security and governance concerns or needs. Thus, there are several themes that generally await deeper academic study (see McMillen 2007).

This paper is framed by the author’s wider and ongoing doctoral research project at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, which aims to address some of the themes and issues mentioned above. It is an early attempt to present a few initial impressions and insights drawn from data primarily generated by the author’s most-recent fieldwork research about German ‘expatriates’ (expats) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as well as preliminary archival-documentary investigations of available information sources.

For the purpose of this research, German expats are defined as both German citizens and persons of another nationality with significant ties to Germany who have ventured beyond the German state on a longer-term basis—that is, for periods of approximately one year.³ The concept of ‘expatriation’ has been employed in the project congruent with renewed scholarly interest (see Fechter 2007; McMillen 2007) in this well-known idea and its possible discriminatory power (see Cohen 1977), and to examine if the term can stand the test as an alternative theoretical framework to inclusively capture the diverse life-styles, conditions and attitudes of people beyond the state. While the present paper does not delve into this discussion in great depth, the limited purpose here is to focus on two of the many

questions of concern in the overall research project, namely:

- What is the demographic profile of German expats in the HKSAR?
- What are some of the governance issues noted by German expats in the HKSAR?

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION CONTEXT

The materials on which this paper is based have been drawn from data primarily generated by the author through survey-questionnaires, in-depth interviews and informal conversations. Information also has been collected through some expert interviews with persons having a significant connection to the German population in the HKSAR and a few extended dialogues with members of the respective expat group that also included a short visit to, and observation of, their actual living conditions and views in this particular environment.

Most of these activities were implemented as part of the author’s research within a conventional fieldwork site and during a personal visit he undertook to the HKSAR from 1 May to 11 July 2010. Some research, however, took on the form of what the anthropologist Louisa Schein (2000: 26) has called ‘secondary or “armchair” fieldwork and was conducted from places outside the HKSAR both prior to and after the author’s visit to that specific site.

Therefore, a first round of short survey-questionnaires was administered by the author from outside the HKSAR over a four-week period between 22 March and 18 April 2010. It targeted members of the German expat population residing in the designated site and was designed to generate initial profile data that was also utilised for subsequent interviewee selection. This questionnaire was distributed by e-mail through a number of relevant research facilitators. These facilitators were comprised of both individual actors as well as groups, primarily based in the HKSAR, but also included some in Germany (and a few in other Chinese places having a connection to the selected site), and were either of partially or entirely of German background, or had a completely different nationality but maintained significant ties to the targeted expat population. They were related to government bodies, public institutions, private businesses, cultural associations or other societal organisations. Completed questionnaires were returned directly to the author.

³ This is similar to the official definition of a long-term migrant by the United Nations (1998: 13).

The in-depth interviews (as well as the expert interviews, the extended dialogues and most of the informal conversations) began after the author's arrival in the HKSAR and lasted throughout his stay there. During this period, as additional research facilitators became identified and available, some further rounds of short survey questionnaires were distributed by the author and were to be completed within four weeks by the participants. Responses were then applied to the continuing interview candidate selection process aimed at identifying people of most-different social backgrounds and based on such criteria as gender, age, occupation, duration of stay, and attitudes towards the German government.

In addition, two sets of more comprehensive survey questionnaires were designed and administered by the author. The first of these was distributed amongst initial informants and given to those participants who had engaged in the short survey questionnaire and agreed to further involvement. The other was offered to new participants following the closure of the short survey questionnaire and after final interviews had taken place. The latter survey was made available for participation for some twelve weeks until late September 2010. While comprehensive surveys of the first set could be passed on to initial participants directly by the author, questionnaires of the second set were again distributed by research facilitators.

Of the 78 respondents who became involved in the research through the several rounds of short surveys administered by the author, 74 or some 95 percent were identified as German expats according to the above-definition.⁴ This represents a reasonable response rate of some 2-4 percent given the estimated total of German expats in the HKSAR, officially said to number some 2000-3000 persons (Nieberg 2010, pers. comm. with the German Consulate-General in the HKSAR, 22 April).⁵ In addition, an overall number of 26 in-depth and 3 expert interviews, as well as 2 extended dialogues, were conducted by the author in the HKSAR, while the numbers of returned comprehensive survey questionnaires totalled 36 at the time of writing.⁶

⁴ Note that for reasons of examining the threshold for long-term expatriation, respondents with duration of stay in the HKSAR of 7-12 month have been included in the analysis.

⁵ It may be noted that, as the ultimate gross population which finally became involved in the survey remains unknown since mediating through research facilitators and snowballing is nearly untraceable, the actual sample could be higher.

⁶ Note that there may still come in some further completed surveys over the next few weeks as participants mail their responses by post.

Given the limitations of this paper and the ongoing process of data analysis, the material presented in the following sections especially relates to the short survey questionnaires and some transcribed interviews. Therefore, these findings must be considered only as preliminary. In addition, it should be noted that the author only has had the time to calculate the frequency of results, and as yet has not been able to run cross-tabulations and computer-based analyses—which will be done in the near future.

PRELIMINARY PROFILE DATA OF GERMAN EXPATS IN THE HKSAR

The demographic profile of the German expat group in the HKSAR—as presented here—has been drawn from the short survey data and obtained from the best available interview material reviewed to the present date. Accordingly, nearly all respondents were exclusively German citizens (93 percent). Just a few persons reported holding an additional citizenship to that of Germany and/or citizenships of a completely different nationality (7 percent). While only two respondents stated holding HKSAR and PRC-citizenships respectively (note that the HKSAR citizenship was alongside a German one), some longer-term venturers detailed in personal communication with the author that they had obtained HKSAR permanent residency status in addition to their German citizenship. This condition is granted by the HKSAR government after seven years of continuous stay in its jurisdiction. It includes an unlimited permit to stay and enables people of different nationalities to participate in communal politics and elections, if they wish. When long-term German citizens were asked in dialogues if they would consider taking up HKSAR-citizenship, nearly all respondents had refused to do so. Even those interviewees who strongly identified themselves with the HKSAR rejected such an option by referring to the fact that they therefore would have to give up their German citizenship demurred because of concerns regarding the “uncertain political status” of the HKSAR in relation to an “undemocratic China” and “possible limitations of basic rights” (especially relating to the freedom of movement). This, and further data provided below, concerning the duration of German venturers to the HKSAR indicates that this group of expats has only temporarily settled in this location. This, however, does not necessarily mean that they intend to permanently return to Germany, as will be shown.

The vast majority of respondents were born in Germany (93 percent). Other reported

countries of birth included Belgium, Brazil, China and the HKSAR, respectively. While females constituted 46 percent of the German expats who completed the short surveys, males comprised 54 percent. These gender numbers are basically in line with recent official data on German emigration streams which noted that males have held a share of 53-59 percent of the total group departing from Germany since 1990 (Sauer & Ette 2007: 40).

Seventy-six percent of respondents reported being married or were living with a partner. Twenty-four percent stated that they were living in the HKSAR as singles. The predominant age group among respondents was 31-45 years of age (55 percent), but another significant group was the 46-65 aged persons (31 percent). It can be proposed that these age groups constitute families and individual persons who are most likely to have completed their education and established an employment or career path. The latter group may especially include couples whose children are already grown up, thus providing such parents with the opportunity for desired and possibly fairly uncomplicated experience abroad as far as daily family responsibilities are concerned. This aspect was noted in some frequent responses of interviewees when they were asked about the reasons and circumstances of their departure from Germany. Persons who have spent most of their work career abroad and have now been sent to the HKSAR by their companies also may be a feature. For them, as with many others, a concern about not finding appropriately challenging or financially rewarding positions in Germany (as compared to those in the HKSAR) seems to be a major driving factor.

A closer look at the occupations of respondents may support this view. Fifty-one percent of the respondents reported working for an employer in the public or private sector and ones of German, local or international background. Some 20 percent stated that they either had their own company or business (usually of smaller size), were engaged in a joint-venture, or were self-employed. For this group, the business-friendly environment of the HKSAR and the simplicity and non-bureaucratic ways of establishing business there appears particularly attractive. The conservative Heritage Foundation, a US-based think tank, regards the HKSAR as the purest market-economy worldwide and its income and company taxes remain the lowest in the world. Ten percent of respondents reported being either students/trainees or pensioners. This data indicates that the HKSAR is only of fair importance in terms of education and is not a major destination for retirement and permanent stays. Nineteen percent of

respondents stated that they were housewives or housemen, either currently unemployed, seeking employment or working on a part-time basis. During the interviews it became clear that many expats who initially came to the HKSAR accompanying their spouses/partners and bringing along their children have, over time, begun to engage in some form of work. This is made possible there due to the local housekeeping system, involving a considerable number of 'maids' from across Southeast Asia. For other working German women, this system played a major role in the decision of whether or not the family should move to the HKSAR or to another location abroad. An additional interesting finding in this regard is that housemen have started to organise themselves into groups that are similar to the classical spouse and women-groups. An international association called 'Home Alone Dads' was identified by the author.

Nevertheless, data concerning the duration of respondents' length of stay indicates that a fair proportion of German expats tend to stay in the HKSAR on a rather long-term basis. Accordingly, 28 percent reported to have lived in this locality for more than 10 years which is far beyond the normal periods of corporate deployment to places abroad (which varies between 2-8 years). Further information drawn from interview dialogues suggests that a considerable proportion of this group becomes involved in relationships with local partners that determine they should remain and switch their work contract from expat deployment (in a pure technical sense) to local conditions. The author also was told by interviewees that they knew a fair number of people who had temporarily come to the HKSAR as employees and had quit their job upon their return to Germany only to move back again (or elsewhere) to establish their own business for the reasons mentioned above. Others returned to find work with a local or international company or simply because they enjoyed the frequently cited "convenient life" of the HKSAR. Some older interviewees had lived in the HKSAR or elsewhere for many years of their lives and stated that they either would not have the money to repatriate/relocate to Germany or were afraid of not again finding work there, considering their age. They expressed an intention either to stay in the HKSAR or to move on to some other place else in Asia where living costs are low enough for them to afford a comfortable lifestyle.

As indicated above, these circumstances raise particular questions concerning official assumptions that Germans who have lived abroad for various periods will sooner or later return to Germany (Sauer & Ette 2007: 71-72). They also blur common notions of temporary

migration that imply back-and-forth movements of people as pertaining to a particular place. As the preceding preliminary discussion about German expats in the HKSAR has shown, movements of people to certain places may be limited, but not necessarily involve a return to their country of origin, which raises questions about conventional conceptions of temporary migration.

SOME SUGGESTIVE GOVERNANCE ISSUES CONCERNING GERMAN EXPATS IN THE HKSAR

A major concern of the author's overall research project is to explore issues related to the governance of German expats and especially the role of the German state in these circumstances. Such questions are considered crucial in the face of heightened social interactions worldwide and the resulting needs and concerns not only of a country's core and distant populations, but also in terms of the latter's respective host environments. The short surveys already sought some initial data in this regard. Thus, respondents were asked whether or not they thought that the German government recognises and sets policies relevant to its expat population in the HKSAR. A number of sub-questions addressed particular issue areas, such as those related to citizenship and voting. While a majority of respondents (32 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the German government's practices of citizenship, only 4 percent indicated their complete satisfaction regarding these matters, though another 16 percent showed principal agreement. Specific problems in this regard concerned citizenship and visa regulations as pertaining to non-German partners. For example, interviewees repeatedly expressed their unease about the difficulties of obtaining long-term visas or citizenship for their long-married non-German partners. In addition, anger was expressed about the treatment of non-German partners in Consular matters, as in the case of visa applications. Interviewees here pointed to instances of avowed "racism", especially in dealings with local Consular staff.

While a majority of respondents (40 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the German government's policies concerning the voting-system applicable to expats was reasonable, it is notable that 61 percent did not participate in a recent election pertaining to Germany. Reasons drawn from interviews were not limited to disinterest in German affairs, but especially expanded to include concerns about the complexity of the voting-system and poor performance by both German Federal and state

governments in alerting citizens about an upcoming election. As one interviewee noted as view of the most-recent Federal election in Germany: "There was only one advertisement in the *South China Morning Post*—if one missed that, one would most-likely also miss the election if not constantly following up with the news."

In a similar vein, as for the provision of information by the German government about the administrative consequences of venturing abroad—including electoral issues—there seems to be room for considerable improvement according to respondents. Hence, a notable 76 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked whether the information policies in this regard were adequate.

Governance issues that were deemed to be managed well by the German government included the protection of citizens abroad, in this case in the HKSAR. A majority of 54 percent expressed their agreement when asked this question.

While there was a widespread perception among respondents (53 percent) that the German government does not really value its citizenry abroad, 41 percent also think that it should care more about matters related to them and their families (even though 43 percent did not think similarly). Among the most cited proposals for action, was the establishment of a central institution at Federal level in Germany that could provide information and services to the country's population abroad. Particular worries concerned both highly specific questions related to expats' inclusion and rights in the social welfare system as well as other rather minor issues, such as those regarding the treatment of drivers' licenses and their renewal.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined a preliminary profile of the German expat population in the HKSAR and has pointed to a number of governance issues particularly related to them—and perhaps also to Germans elsewhere. Among the most interesting findings at this stage of the data analysis is the circumstance that nearly all respondents still held and wanted to retain their German citizenship, even though they did not necessarily intend to return to Germany. In this context, it is also notable that many expats simply do not know what their next destinations will be and therefore wish for an institution at German Federal state-level that could assist them in various respects concerning matters related to their country of origin. If a further review of the

research findings confirms that German elections inadequately, promoted abroad, this could be an important issue area that needs to be addressed by the German government in the future.

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Table of Contents

Migrant Security 2010: Citizenship and social inclusion in a transnational era	1
An Interdisciplinary Culturally Responsive Methodology: A Samoan Perspective	2
Meaola Amituanai-Tolosa & Stuart McNaughton	2
Learning Literacy; Constructing Identity: Migrant and Refugee Participation in English Language Programs	9
Michael Atkinson	9
Meeting the Stranger Within: Considering a Pedagogy of Belonging	17
Jon Austin	17
Murder, Community Talk and Belonging: An exploration of Sudanese community responses to murder	25
Melanie Baak	25
Migration, Religion and Responses by Universities	35
Krzysztof Batorowicz & William Conwell	35
The Condition of ‘Permanent Temporariness’ for Salvadorans in the US and Koreans in Japan: A Study of Legal and Cultural Citizenship	42
William W. Castillo Guardado.....	42
‘Going Back’: Homeland and Belonging for Greek Child Migrants	49
Alexandra Dellios	49
Proactive communication management beats hostile media exposure: training for multi-cultural community leaders in living with mass media	56
Lee Duffield & Shilpa Bannerjee	56
Behind the ‘Big Man’: Uncovering hidden migrant networks within Scandinavian-Australian sources	65
Mark Emmerson	65
Migrants Between Worlds: Inclusion, Identity and Australian Intercountry Adoption	70
Richard Gehrman.....	70
Framing a research project to explore the experiences of international staff in an Australian university	77
Sara Hammer, Gillian Colclough & Henk Huijser	77
Looking through the Gap in the Fence: A Discussion with Employers’ of Skilled Migrants	84
Michelle Harding.....	84
Gender, migration and human security: HIV vulnerability among rural to urban migrants in the People’s Republic of China	91
Anna Hayes	91
Johann Christian Heussler – German liberal (1820-1907)	99
Chris Herde	99
Catholicism and Alcoholism: The Irish Diaspora lived ethics of the Dropkick Murphys punk band	106
Kieran James & Bligh Grant	106

The Dutch on the Tweed	115
Martin Jansen in de Wal	115
The importance of global immigration to South Korea’s nation branding strategies	123
Bongmi Kim	123
Rural Migrant Workers and Civil Society in China: case study of a migrant labour NGO	130
Peifeng Lin	130
Workplace Experiences of International Academic Staff in South Australian Universities	137
Nina Maadad & Nouné Melkourian	137
Rethinking Resentment: Political memory and identity in Australia’s Salvadoran community	146
Robert Mason	146
Migrant Symphonies – the symphonic contribution of resident British composers to Australian musical life	153
Rhoderick McNeill	153
Researching People Beyond the State: A Preliminary Study of German Expatriates in Hong Kong and Governance Performance	159
Thorsten Nieberg	159
A Pacific migrant experience: A case study on the impact of alcohol on migrant Niuean men to Auckland, New Zealand	166
Vili Hapaki Nosa, Peter Adams & Ian Hodges	166
Changing culture, changing practice: Securing a sense of self	174
Eleanor Peeler	174
Negotiating locals in Britain: The relationship between asylum seekers and the local British community in East Anglia	182
Sophia Rainbird	182
Exploring transnational sentiment through embodied practices of music and migratory movement	189
Kerri-Anne Sheehy	189
‘Repatriation is a Must’: The Rastafari in Ethiopia	196
Maria Stratford	196
Investigating the role of Australian media in making Sudanese refugees feel ‘at home’: A case of advocating online media support to enable refugee settlement	201
Kitty Van Vuuren & Aparna Hebbani	201
The interplay of social context and personal attributes in immigrants’ adaptation and satisfaction with the move to Australia	209
Susan Ellen Watt, Marcella Ramelli & Mark Rubin	209
Work is a human right: seeking asylum, seeking employment	217
Rosemary Webb	217

Migrant Security 2010: Citizenship and social inclusion in a transnational era

15-16 July 2010

**Public Memory Research Centre
Faculty of Arts, University of Southern Queensland**

The symposium convenors would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians,
the Giabal and Jarowair, on whose land this meeting takes place.
We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

The national symposium ‘Migrant Security: Citizenship and social inclusion in a transnational era’ was hosted by the University of Southern Queensland’s Toowoomba campus on the 15th and 16th July 2010. The symposium attracted delegates from across Australian universities, as well as delegates from New Zealand, the United States and Europe. In addition, presentations and papers were provided by governmental and non-governmental bodies affiliated with the provision of services for migrants and refugees. The conference proceedings that follow offer a selection of some of the over seventy papers presented during the two days of the main symposium. Each of the papers included in the proceedings have been double peer-reviewed in their entirety, prior to acceptance in this online collection.

Migration has been central to Toowoomba’s history for thousands of years, with a major Indigenous meeting place located close to the city. More recently, Toowoomba has welcomed large numbers of African refugees from various backgrounds. Indeed, twenty five per cent of Toowoomba’s overseas population has arrived within the last decade. The new presence of these visibly different and culturally diverse groups has prompted large proportions of the city to recall and to question the historical and contemporary nature of whiteness and blackness in the Darling Downs region and south-east Queensland. As such, it was particularly apposite that the symposium was hosted at the University of Southern Queensland.

The symposium probed new formulations of migrants’ experience of community and individual security through their engagement with civic life. It drew particular attention to the changing nature of belonging in modern societies, and the implication of this for citizenship. Contributors proved especially interested by the various forms of insecurity that prevented migrants from attaining a sense of inclusion and belonging, and how local and transnational networks might mitigate this. Key themes that are explored in the proceedings include the nature of inclusive education, the role of interculturality in the modern society, and ways to develop meaningful forms of cultural security and social.