Child care so costly immigrants sending babies back to China [CA] [1]

Author: Jimenez, Marina
Source: Globe and Mail
Format: Article
Publication Date: 1 Jan 2007

AVAILABILITY
See text below.

EXCERPTS

Sunny Wu had just immigrated to Canada from China when she discovered she was pregnant. Overjoyed, Ms. Wu prepared for her baby's arrival, never imagining that within a year, she would have to endure the agony and loneliness of being separated from her daughter.

Ms. Wu, a Chinese teacher, and her husband, a computer programmer, were squeaking by on minimum-wage jobs and could not afford to pay $1,200 a month for daycare. Ms. Wu, 34, also knew she would have to return to university if she didn't want to spend the rest of her life as an overeducated, embittered immigrant, packaging groceries for $7 an hour.

Though the separation was devastating, the couple could see no other way out. They sent their baby daughter to China to be raised by her grandmother, who was already caring for the toddler they had left behind.

...

According to social workers in Toronto's Chinese community, dozens, even hundreds, of recent Chinese immigrants have sent their infants back to China to spend their early years with relatives. They are separated from their own children due to financial constraints and unaffordable daycare in a country they came to, ironically, because they thought it would be a great place to raise children.

...

It raises troubling questions about how well Canada's immigration selection model is working &emdash; and may help explain the recent decrease in immigration applications from China.

...

As China's economy has surged ahead in recent years, the number of immigration applications to Canada has dropped off dramatically. The number of Chinese applicants decreased to 19,000 in 2006 from a high of 40,000 in 2004, compared with 132,000 applicants last year from India.

Word has travelled back to China &emdash; the Canadian dream isn't all it's cracked up to be, said Sunny Wu. She would do anything to recapture those early years with her children. When she and her husband immigrated to Toronto in 1999, they were buoyed by their good fortune, dreaming of a new life in a clean, friendly country of wide open spaces.

They were planning to send for their older daughter once they got settled. "The immigration agency said Canada was the best place to live," said Sunny Wu, an extrovert who speaks English flawlessly.

However, when her second child was born in November of 2000, her husband was still searching for work. Her mother came from China and flew back with the baby when she turned 13 months. "It was so difficult. I had breast-fed her and so we were very close," Sunny Wu said.

Her older daughter came to live with them when she turned 2 and her husband finally had a job in his field, but her second child didn't rejoin the family until she was 4.

"I found when I saw my second daughter again in the airport, she was like a stranger to me. I missed her so much," Sunny Wu said. "She said, 'where is my mommy? My mommy is a computer.' She was so used to be talking to me via video camera."

In China, it is the cultural norm for grandparents to help raise children (though they are usually together in the same house). Sunny Wu was raised by her grandmother, and only reunited with her mother at the age of 11. She could never overcome the estrangement, and remains more closely bonded to her grandmother.

Now that her two daughters, aged 6 and 8, have been reunited with their parents, Sunny Wu believes they are exhibiting signs of psychological damage from the separation. Her younger daughter always seeks out her grandmother, who also lives with them, if she is

hurt or upset. She is a less confident child than her first-born, and tends to be clingy, Sunny Wu said.

"During her first week in kindergarten, she wouldn't let us leave the room. It's like she doesn't trust us as parents any more."

...

Judith Bernhard, director of the Early Childhood Education master's program at Ryerson University, says the psychological damage of separated children who reunite with their families can be severe.

"The most common issue is that the parent loses his or her status as an authority figure," says Prof. Bernhard, who has conducted research into transnational mothers from Latin America.

...

An immigration selection model that recruits professionals who end up being forced to accept blue-collar jobs is a flawed one, she says. "This story also points to the fact that Canada doesn't have subsidized daycare, while countries such as Sweden, Finland and even China do."

Marina Wilson, a spokeswoman with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, says the department is acutely aware of the difficulties foreign professionals face getting their credentials recognized and is working closely with the provinces and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to address the issue. "We are also putting up a portal on the CIC website so prospective newcomers can assess themselves before deciding to immigrate. We don't want to mislead them," Ms. Wilson said.

Last month, Ontario passed the country's first bill aimed at helping internationally trained professionals work in their fields. The bill requires the province's regulated professions to ensure their licensing process is fair and transparent, and to assess credentials more quickly. A commissioner will look at eliminating barriers to entering professional associations.

This initiative has been applauded by agencies working with immigrants &emdash; although some say still more internships are needed so that foreign doctors and engineers may requalify here.

...

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Region: Asia [2]

Tags: affordability [3]

funding [4]

availability [5]

diversity [6]

Links

[1] https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/07/01/child-care-so-costly-immigrants-sending-babies-back-china-ca [2] https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/asia [3] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability [4] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding [5] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/availability [6] https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/diversity