

CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE, INTEGRATION, IDENTITY AND BELONGING**OVERVIEW**

“Without having a curriculum geared towards non-native Chinese speakers, they are being condemned to menial jobs, continuing poverty and even crime.”¹

Over the course of the last one hundred and fifty years in the space of which the world has seen vast levels of migration, countries of immigration have stood differently on the spectrum of policies of multiculturalism and diversity that have been adopted by them. The sentiment behind these policies is invariably driven by the politics of need and capacity of the nations.

A country’s approach to managing diversity is often apparent from its regulation of terms of entry into and residence in the territory, its core policies on population management, access to public services and utilities, and the quality of life it permits immigrants through these policies.

The policies usually impact the life course of immigrants in terms of respects, ranging from education, healthcare, employment and welfare. These policies often act as a litmus test as to whether the framework of governance is designed to boost, maintain or deter levels of immigration. Indeed, the policies can also be used to target particular types of migrants with desirable skillsets to fill gaps in the market.

On the whole, such policies serve as a defining marker of a country’s approach to diversity, and may be aimed at accommodation, inclusion, integration or assimilation or are sometimes used as a tool to exclude immigrants generally or exclude particular groups of migrants.

After the Second World War, there was a proliferation of human rights treaties signaling the importance of the recognition of the equal worth and dignity of all human beings.² International bills of rights³ incorporated protections of various rights, including equality, non-discrimination, and minority rights to protect one’s identity, language and heritage in recognition of the dignity inherent in all people.

Notwithstanding meaningful attempts to bridge cultural divides (mainly organised by NGOs and other private actors, including for example summer youth mentorship programmes run by universities)⁴, cultural barriers also dominate the local mind-set. Bhowan Tamang, a Nepalese student, grew up in Hong Kong and is now studying finance at university. However, he says that “people can easily tell that I am Nepalese, so I’m treated as an immigrant instead of as a Hong Konger.”⁵

A study on racial encounters conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2009 found that around 30% of the local population surveyed harboured negative feelings towards ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.⁶ There are many Hong Kong Chinese who have never encountered or interacted with ethnic minorities. There are numerous reasons for this, including the high concentration of ethnic minority groups in particular geographical districts and the segregated schooling system described in Chapter 3 on the Education of Ethnic Minorities.

These negative sentiments have a serious and longstanding effect on the way in which ethnic minorities are treated in Hong Kong and their day-to-day experiences.

For example, the consultation exercise in the drafting of the Race Discrimination Ordinance revealed the many instances of prejudice routinely faced by ethnic minorities on public transport, in hospitals, by landlords, and shopkeepers, many of whom refused to serve them or treated them poorly on account of their ethnic minority status (these experiences are discussed in the Chapter on The Rights of Ethnic Minorities Under the Law: Equality and Non-Discrimination of this Report).



A survey on the situation of racial discrimination in Hong Kong conducted by the Social Work Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong reported first-hand experience of ethnic minority participants of the focus group of the study.⁷ In the case of employment, a security guard expressed that he felt uncomfortable about signing an employment contract written in Chinese. With respect to finding rental accommodation, there were complaints over property agents' unwillingness to help ethnic minorities search for homes for rent and landlords' refusal to rent properties to ethnic minorities. In the social service domain, participants opined that language barriers, insensitivity of government officials, and social workers and discrimination by community residents, were some of the key factors limiting their access to education, employment, vocational training, housing and other social welfare resources. Each of these issues is echoed and borne out by the anecdotal and empirical evidence presented in the subsequent chapters of this Report.



Another survey conducted by the Society for Community Organization in February 2004 revealed that more than a third of ethnic minorities has experienced communication problems with hospital staff, rendering them unable to fully express their health concerns and problems to the doctors and nurses. The survey revealed that such difficulty is not only experienced by the non-Chinese speaking ethnic minorities but is also shared by those who speak English as a second language.⁸



Paul O'Connor, Assistant Professor of the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, interviewed 37 local young Muslims and many of them responded that, despite being able to speak fluent Cantonese, the fact that they were not able to read and write Chinese as well as Hong Kong Chinese was a significant barrier once they left school. O'Connor commented that the language barrier causes the minorities to feel increasingly peripheral despite their willingness to contribute to society.⁹

These sentiments and prejudice have potential for grave damage as we learnt sadly through incidents of cultural misunderstanding or prejudice which has led to loss of liberty and life of ethnic minority individuals. The cases of Hari Veriah who died at Ruttonjee Hospital and Limbu, who was fatally shot by a policeman despite being unarmed and posing no immediate threat to life or property are just two examples.



These attitudes can also impact accessibility to quality public services, for example, the inability of abused ethnic minority to access shelters or police assistance against domestic violence¹⁰, or lack of access to proper healthcare for medical and even racial profiling as experienced at the hands of police¹¹, immigration and customs officials. (These issues and examples are detailed in Chapter 6 on Marriage, Family and Domestic Violence, Chapter 7 on the Healthcare Needs of Ethnic Minorities and Chapter 8 on Crime and Law Enforcement of this Report).

These barriers have a grave and serious impact on the ability and capacity of minorities' enjoyment of quality of life and sense of belonging in Hong Kong.

In this chapter we will examine the challenges faced by ethnic minorities due to these barriers to integration, and more specifically, language and cultural barriers.

A. THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CULTIVATING BELONGING AND IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language plays an indispensable role in cultivating inclusion, a sense of belonging and social capital in the lives of minority population groups.¹² Mastery of the local language also strengthens opportunities for upward social mobility and the ability to access relevant services available in the public and private domains in areas which underscore possibilities for a good quality life.

89.5% of Hong Kong's population speaks Cantonese as their habitual language of communication.¹³ As we note in Chapter 3 on the Education of Ethnic Minorities, the flaws inherent in the current education system fail to facilitate effective learning of the Chinese language for ethnic minority students. This impacts their ability to participate meaningfully in Hong Kong society due to its knock-on effects¹⁴: ethnic minority students first struggle to enter tertiary education for failing to meet the minimum requirement in Chinese language; this impacts their chances to enter into highly skilled and professional job sectors. They then face difficulties in the job market because most employers require proficiency in Chinese as a matter of industry standard. As a result, most ethnic minorities end up in low-paying jobs and are overrepresented among those living in poverty. A lack of proficiency in Chinese also deprives them of access to important information and opportunities, in turn affecting their exercise and realization of fundamental rights,

including the rights to full and equal participation in the cultural and political life of Hong Kong alongside their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts.

Therefore, language skills are an important enabler in the sense that the enjoyment of other rights is possible only when one is aware of his rights and has the means to communicate his wish to enforce such rights. One's rights are not meaningful when one cannot, due to language barriers, scrutinise the actions of others which may affect those rights.

The drawbacks of the education system as it pertains to ethnic minorities are more fully set out in Chapter 3 on Education of Ethnic Minorities. For present purposes, the main issues are:

- The knowledge gap regarding the education system between ethnic minority and Chinese parents
- The poor accessibility of the education system to ethnic minorities
- *De facto* segregation of ethnic minority and Hong Kong Chinese students
- Low degrees of ethnic minority parental involvement in the school experiences of their children

Language difficulties play a major role in exacerbating each these problems. It can be immediately seen that language barriers (e.g. in the course of entrance interviews) can reduce the number of schools accessible to an ethnic minority student; that because of these language requirements and the fact that public sector government and aided schools (sometimes referred to as “mainstream schools”) may not be linguistically equipped to teach ethnic minority students, *de facto* segregation may occur; that the knowledge gap between ethnic minority and Chinese parents may be the result of much information about the education system being published and disseminated only in Chinese; and that parental involvement is difficult when there are language barriers to not only interpersonal communication with teachers but also in such mundane issues as understanding, complying with and signing off on school notices.

Given this spate of language-related education problems, it is encouraging to see the Government in recent years acknowledge the failure of its previous education policies for ethnic minorities, notably of the “designated school” system and of the refusal to implement a “Chinese as a second language” policy. The Government has commendably proposed new reforms aimed at reducing the impact that language difficulties have on the educational attainment of ethnic minorities. There are however, doubts as to the effectiveness of the proposed approach since it does not facilitate the teaching of Chinese as a Second Language. However, the effect of such reforms remains to be seen.

A.1 Primary and Secondary Education

Language barriers hinder the overall learning experience of ethnic minority children at school, especially when other subjects apart from language are taught in Chinese. Without a solid grasp of Chinese, it will naturally be difficult for ethnic minority students to acquire knowledge in other areas with Chinese as the medium of instruction (“CMI”). For this reason, many ethnic minorities children (or their parents) tend to prefer schools with English as the medium of instruction (“EMI schools”) or schools which were formally ‘designated’ as schools for non-Chinese speaking students (“NCS Students”). The difficulty in EMI schools, on the other hand, is the lack of a ‘Chinese as a Second Language’ (“CSL”) curriculum allowing ethnic minorities to learn Chinese on a competitive basis with their Hong Kong counterparts and earn a qualification in Chinese which is recognised by academic institutions or employers, allowing ethnic minorities to

meet the minimum entry requirements for university and meet the daily demands at work in Hong Kong.

The Challenges of Learning Chinese and the Lack of a CSL Curriculum

There is currently no CSL curriculum in local primary and secondary schools. The existing Chinese curriculum does not cater for the special learning needs of the non-Chinese speaking ethnic minorities. Even worse, there is currently no professionally trained teacher to support the language learning needs of non-Chinese speaking students.¹⁵

Since 2004, all non-Chinese speaking students are eligible to study in government-subsidised schools. These are mainstream schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction (“CMI schools”).¹⁶ Louisa Castro, a liberal studies teacher at a “designated school” says that her students cannot even write their schools’ names in Chinese after six years’ of Chinese language classes. Even Castro herself can speak fluent English, Cantonese and Mandarin but she has very limited proficiency in written Chinese.¹⁷

Ullah Rizwan finds that even though ethnic minority students achieved high grades in the General Certificate for Secondary Examination (GCSE) Chinese examination, they fail to obtain the Chinese proficiency that is required by higher education or expected by employers.¹⁸

However, most ethnic minorities students still go to the “designated schools”,¹⁹ the primary and secondary schools which used to be “designated” to receive extra funding to provide language support for linguistic minorities.

Parents understand that mainstream schools offer better chances for their children to develop Chinese skills and make Chinese friends, thus facilitating integration. However, various factors still push them towards the designated schools – since mainstream schools offer little language support and parents are worried about social isolation, racism and bullying to their children, most parents still choose the ‘designated schools’.²⁰ Over the years, there has been a gradual trend of decreasing number of non-Chinese speaking students attending government or aided schools. They opt for ‘designated schools’ instead.²¹ As a result, there are a greater proportion of ethnic minorities students in ‘designated schools’ than in mainstream schools. The student population of ethnic minorities at some of these schools even reaches 80-90%.²² This clearly presents challenges in terms of integration and developing mutual understanding between youths of different ethnicities.

The lack of suitable policies on multiculturalism and classroom diversity, including the lack of a CSL curriculum leaves, ‘designated schools’ intact even though they have been formally disbanded since 2013, fueling segregation for lack of a suitable alternative for parents of ethnic minority children.

As a result, inaccessibility in real terms to the education system and opportunities to learn Chinese effectively leads to barrier to admission in higher education institutions and consequently, impacts prospects for employment. This creates a vicious cycle of poverty that hinders social mobility of the minorities largely a result of failure by design in facilitating segregation which is due to a lack of training of suitably qualified teaching professionals to teach a multicultural student body about identity, language, heritage and equality.²³

A.2 Higher Education Opportunities

The required pass in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education’s (HKDSE) Chinese qualifications undoubtedly hinders ethnic minorities from entering into university. Indeed only 50% of Hong Kong Chinese students attained Level 2 in the examination. This just goes to show that the Chinese curriculum itself is challenging and needs to be

redesigned. In 2013, it was reported that only 120 ethnic minority students were admitted to degree courses.²⁴ The rest could only resort to vocational training programmes, associate degree programmes or other support programmes to receive further education. However, only 4 out of 160 vocational programmes provided by the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education are in English.²⁵ Other options, such as training courses run by the Vocational Training Council and the Employee Retraining Board are nearly all in Chinese as well. Project *Yi-jin*, a programme designed to help those who have not done well in the school systems, is only available in Chinese²⁶. Ethnic minority students are therefore left with very few options once they fail to meet the minimum requirement for university. For some of the vocational courses, even though they are listed as taught in English, they have compulsory Chinese course components to them, making satisfactory completion of the courses challenging for ethnic minority students.

A3. Impact of Language Proficiency on General Job Prospects

Ethnic minority graduates routinely face frustrations in the pursuit of their desired career paths. In Chapter 3 on the Education of Ethnic Minorities, we note the experience of Sammi, an ethnic minority student, who had to quit his internship at a fast food chain for failing to understand customer orders despite having completed the Chinese curriculum at a “designated school” and passed the GCSE Chinese Language examination. Such examples are numerous.

Louisa Castro, a teacher at one of the “designated schools” says that the language education system in Hong Kong is producing “semi-illiterate ethnic minority students, who struggle to learn their native language, then English and Chinese.”²⁷



Fermi Wong, Founder and Executive Director of Hong Kong Unison reported that she came across an ethnic minority student who made it through the degree course but was still rejected by many employers because of his lack of proficiency in Chinese. He ended up as an Activity Manager, earning approximately \$7,000 a month. According to Wong, most ethnic minority youth target manual occupations, shop work or catering industries by seeking positions as a waiter, construction worker or security guard. Moreover, they often lack promotion opportunities due to language barriers.²⁸



Another example is Faisal, a 22 year-old third-generation Pakistani who studied in one of the “designated schools” and attained an A in the GCSE Chinese Language examination. He was turned down time and again when he applied for a clerical and a delivery job. Seeing the numerous doors that have been shut in his face as a result of the ‘choice’ he made, he regrets having studied at one of the “designated schools.”²⁹

Jeffrey Andrews, a 28-year-old Indian, shares the same fate in chasing his dream to play professional football for Hong Kong, a career one would not have thought to require Chinese language skills. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Andrews speaks flawless Cantonese but is unable to read or write Chinese. He explained that he had to give up the dream of becoming a professional football player because he could not fill in the application form in Chinese. He later considered becoming a football coach and went to the Hong Kong Football Association, only to learn that he needed to pass an examination in Chinese. His frustration is shared by childhood friend, Abdul Aziz, a 23-year-old Pakistani, who explains that, *“It’s like there’s a [can] of food in front of us, but we cannot eat it because we don’t know how to open it.”*³⁰

Without an English application form, these youth were deprived of a chance to enter into their desired career or even to settle for something related due to the obstacle of having to pass the written Chinese test.

In 2013, the Hong Kong Football Association finally lifted the language bar and decided to resume the English tests, which were discontinued since 1998.³¹ Unfortunately for Andrews though, this does not mean that he is free to live his dream albeit belatedly because he is now nearly 30 years old and too old for the career.

As expected, those without a job who find themselves discriminated in the job market are far more distracted by the urgency of the need to survive and to find work to support themselves and their family that they do not have the time or energy to engage the present complaints mechanisms or legal system to avail of protections under the law (to the extent that they do exist).

Until we see examples of organisations and employers adopting more liberal and fairer recruitment policies, ethnic minorities will continue to encounter challenges in the process of securing employment.

Detailed statistics on the employment of ethnic minorities in different job sectors is explored more fully in Chapter 4 on the Employment of Ethnic Minorities.

B. WHO IS A HONG KONGER? INTEGRATION, IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN HONG KONG

B1. Citizenship Education and Policy Planning for a Multicultural Hong Kong

The language barrier poses one of the most significant barriers to leading a life that is full with numerous possibilities. Language competence is not only the lifeline to equal opportunities in education and employment or any merit based venture, but it is also indispensable in cultivating a strong Hong Kong identity and a sense of belonging. The inability to communicate in Chinese in Hong Kong significantly impacts access to information (although according to the Hong Kong Basic Law, Hong Kong has two official languages, one of which is English), which is key to active social and political participation in one’s community, district and society more broadly. Notably, language is one of the criteria for assessment for eligibility for naturalization as a Chinese.

Access to Information

Due to language and cultural barriers, ethnic minorities often face difficulties in their daily lives. The effects of the barriers manifest themselves most acutely in access to information and public services and the exercise of their basic human rights.

Ethnic minorities are often found to be ill-informed about government services and policies and their entitlements because much of the information remains inaccessible to them due to the information being predominantly in Chinese and occasionally available in English. Given that there are a sizeable group of ethnic minorities who are not versed in either languages, and in light of the obligations under the Race Discrimination Ordinance, the Government has a duty to make certain information widely available in other languages corresponding to those understood by ethnic minority groups living in Hong Kong. This would facilitate enhanced and equal access to information and consequently, the exercise and enjoyment of human rights by ethnic minorities.

Areas in which the information deficit has most acutely been felt include social welfare and education. For example, most ethnic minorities do not know much about the public housing scheme in Hong Kong and are under the mistaken impression that they are not qualified to apply for public housing. Some others, however, who have successfully applied for public housing, may decide to give up their place nonetheless because they are allocated housing in the New Territories, which results in a loss of their support systems and community networks, which are concentrated in specific districts in Hong Kong.³² If Hong Kong were better integrated as a society with appropriate community support networks for people of different backgrounds provided for across Hong Kong, we would see a spread of different ethnic minority communities across various districts.

Some ethnic minorities, particularly women, lack information about the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance scheme and the circumstances of their entitlement under the scheme. When their families undergo a separation or sudden death of a spouse, the sole breadwinner in many instances as ethnic minority women tend to be unemployed or choose to stay at home and their children are hard-pressed to find jobs that pay decently, these families are overrepresented among those living below the poverty line.³³

Another acute area where the information gap pervades and has a detrimental impact is education. A survey conducted by Hong Kong Christian Services in 2011 found that 86.4% of ethnic minority students at primary level and 43.7% of ethnic minority students at the secondary level did not know about or misunderstood the “3-3-4 scheme” (whereby the HKDSE would replace HKCEE and HKALE).³⁴ Moreover, 91.3% of the ethnic minority students at primary schools and 82.9% ethnic minority students at secondary schools did not know about or misunderstood the minimum requirement of the Chinese Language for admission into university in Hong Kong. The respondents indicated that they mostly relied on parents and friends in the ethnic minority circle in obtaining information and making decisions about education. Whilst there are certainly other factors at play that create and perpetuate the information gap for ethnic minorities, including parental education levels, district of residence, gross family income and years of residence in Hong Kong, it appears that language and cultural barriers are invariably prominent obstacles that exacerbate lack of accessibility to information.

Although accessibility to opportunities to acquire language skills is vital, it is but one of the many factors that need to be considered in the formulation of policies for facilitating equality of access to components of a good and meaningful life; a life that is free from discrimination and is respectful of the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals regardless of colour, race, origin, etc. and most importantly, a life in which everyone is equally empowered to pursue their life goals. This requires not only teaching

all children their rights but also teaching children the importance of respecting other people's rights and that they are part of the machinery that enables effective protection of human rights. However, as a recent study commissioned by the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF concluded, Hong Kong's education system has recently been found wanting in the area of children's rights education. Our teachers lack training in the teaching of human and children's rights and indeed, have some misperceptions about the notion that rights are inherent. Consequently, our children have a poor sense of understanding of their own rights and that they are not dependent on them complying with any conditions because rights are inherent.³⁵

Moreover, plenty of pedagogical approaches have emerged as successfully engendering the development of an identity that strengthens confidence in one's own heritage and ethnic identity, whilst securing a strong allegiance to the society in which one resides by developing mutual understanding, respect, trust and communication pathways. The emergence of such well-rounded individuals dedicated to their civic duties and ready to contribute to society, whilst fully cognizant and appreciative of their individual identity, is possible with a well-designed education system that accounts for the multifaceted and complex nature of identities in today's globalized context and prioritises citizenship education for a multicultural world. Indeed, Lorenzo Zuccas highlights the value and role of the classroom as a laboratory of multiculturalism.

Living Together in Hong Kong or in a Parallel Universe?

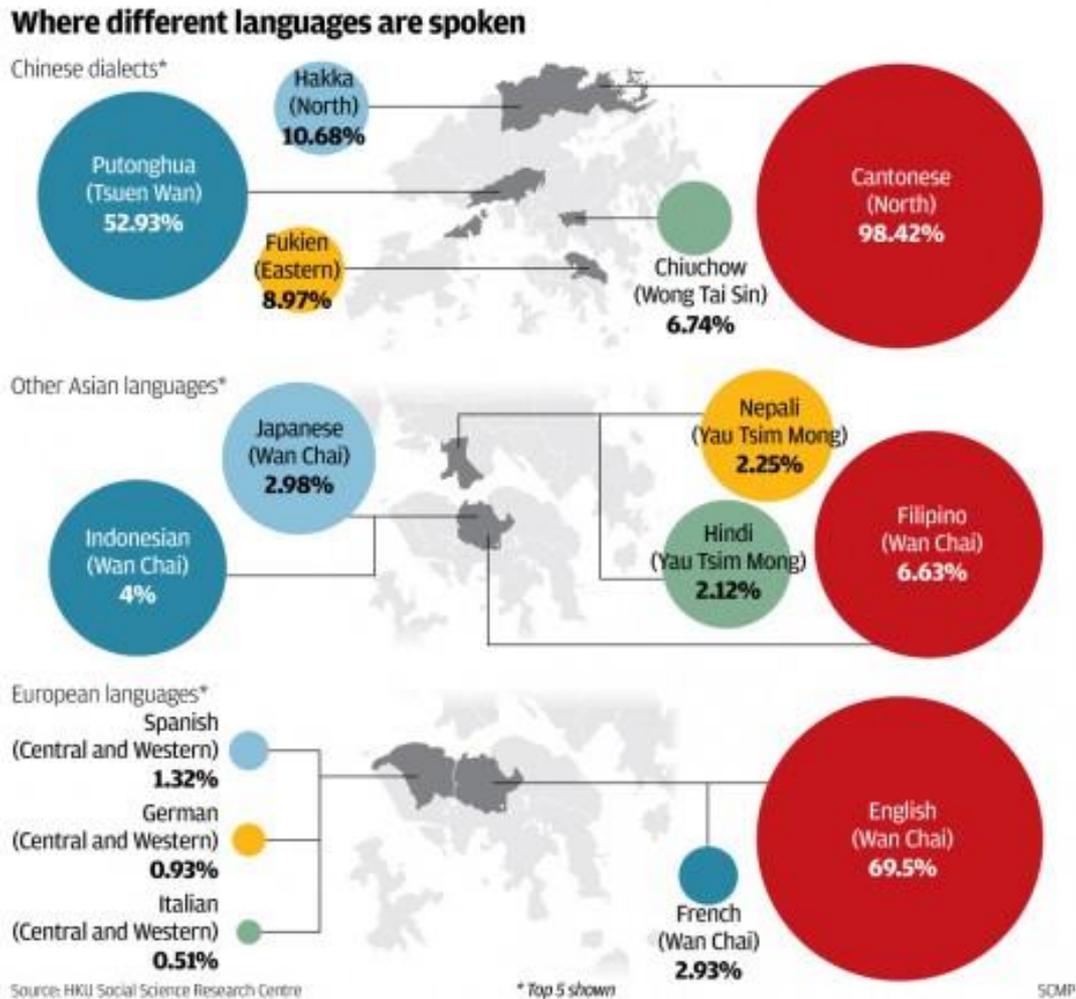
Apart from education, such a government pays close heed to the other areas of the life of the nation to create spaces for the cultivation of values of understanding, respect, trust and communication. This requires a government to actively think about the nature and spaces for community dialogue and discourse, both in formal and informal spheres. It also needs to examine the living arrangements and demography of minority and majority communities and take these matters into account in urban and social planning and policymaking. For example, the gradual ghettoization of certain pockets in some of the districts in Hong Kong is important to reflect on. What are the implications of these ethnic enclaves emerging and what impact does it have on the resources and needs of that community, including, impacts on educational, health and welfare needs or impact on crime rates and the need for trained professionals.

Graph 2.1 below shows the geographical distribution of ethnic groups across Hong Kong's 18 districts, relative to the Hong Kong Chinese population residing in those districts in 2011.

Graph 2.2 below shows the denominations of different ethnic groups residing in each of the 18 districts in Hong Kong in 2011.

The linguistic diversity of the population of Hong Kong is represented in the Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 Where different languages are spoken in Hong Kong, 2015

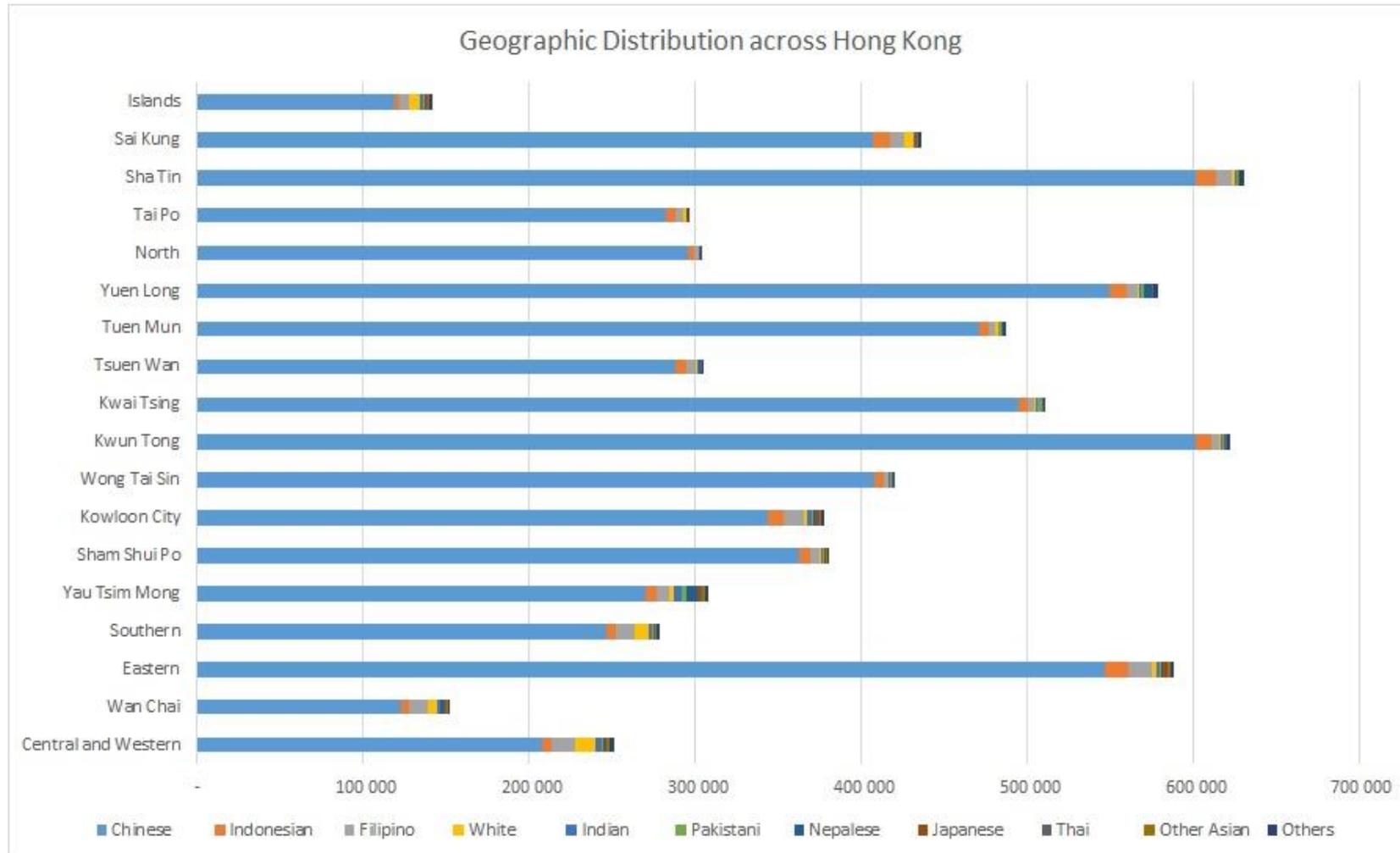


Source: HKU Social Science Research Centre

Coupled with the inevitable consequences of the former designated school system, the continued impediments to accessing schools in the public system, limited employment opportunities confined to particular sectors, discrimination in housing and other areas of life, invariably means that ethnic minorities, their voices and their needs are invisible. Any exposure on the part of the Hong Kong Chinese population is fairly limited and is heavily influenced by media, stereotypes and the lack of an active inclusive citizenship policy.

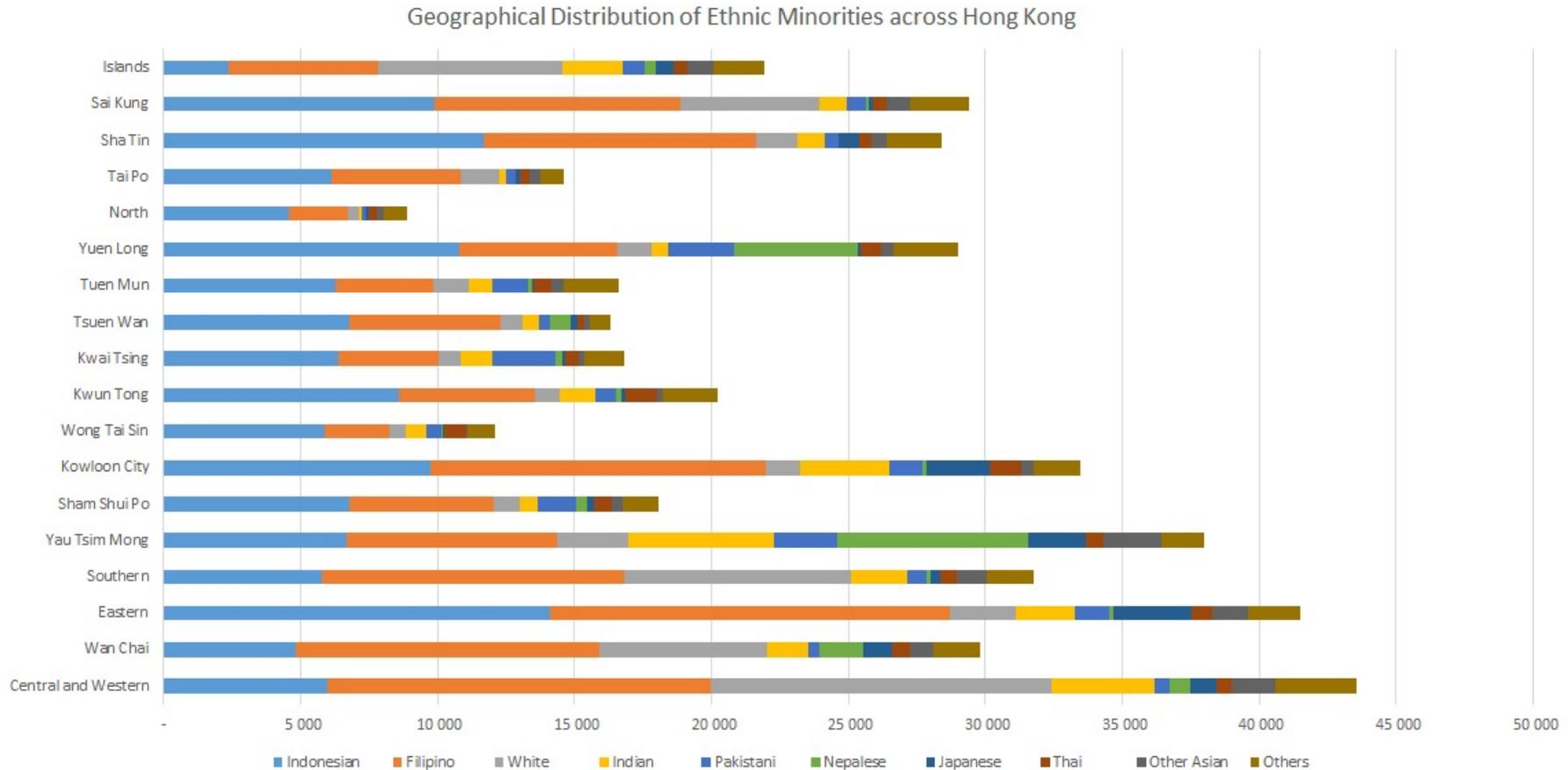
The demographic factors coupled with failed or absent policies make encounters between the ethnic minority community and the Hong Kong population a rarity. Unfortunately, such a lack of personalised interaction and experience is fertile breeding ground for the internalisation of negative stereotypes about minorities as portrayed by media, movies and newspapers. In recent years, these stereotypes have catapulted into mass media as a result of a lack of cultural competence and sensitivity or respect.

Graph 2.1 Geographical Distribution of Ethnic Groups Across Hong Kong's 18 Districts



Source: Census Online Access Tool

Graph 2.2 The Distribution of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong by District



Source: Census Online Access Tool

B2. Ethnic minorities and national education

Ethnic minority responses to the aborted national education curriculum proposed by the Government in 2012 provide further insights into how current education policymaking is not conducive to the proper integration of ethnic minorities into mainstream society.

What kind of curricular content would be suitable to help cultivate the desired qualities in citizens or nationals? The question of identity in the context of Hong Kong is more complex, given the tensions between a Hong Kong Chinese identity, a Chinese national identity and the values and qualities that are necessary for global citizenship given Hong Kong's unique history and current status as it transitions from a colony to a Special Administrative Region.

The purpose, need for and nature of civic education and curricular content for the post-80s generation and non-ethnic Chinese Hong Kong citizens and the question of their sense of belonging and the need for an organic approach to understanding complex and multiple identities has to be a part of the Government's list of priority areas to focus on in the coming decade.

This past year has speaks to the timeliness of the political awakening of Hong Kong's Chinese youth and their participation in the August 2012 movement against the proposed introduction of compulsory moral and national (MNE) education but also, the youth movement signalled an awakening among ethnic minority youths as well.

The MNE curriculum was criticised as inappropriate as it "emphasised too much on being Chinese and being part of China, instead of taking a more critical approach to citizen values", and also because it might create tensions between Chinese and non-Chinese children since the Chinese children might become overly nationalistic and look down upon ethnic minorities³⁶. Furthermore, critics also pointed out that there was no consultation with ethnic minority communities before the subject was proposed, and that there was a risk of pushing a "Chinese" identity upon an ethnic minority community with few links to China (as opposed to Hong Kong).³⁷

The textbooks and materials presently being used to teach liberal studies in Hong Kong have also been heavily criticised as problematic as the content stereotypes ethnic minorities as manual labourers and domestic workers³⁸ and may well affect ethnic minority students' sense of identity and self-respect due to being "scripted" into specific occupations. At the same time, it perpetuates existing stereotypes in the minds of young Hong Kong children.

The discussion over the introduction of compulsory moral and national education in Hong Kong and these controversial textbook examples being used to teach about diversity in Hong Kong have brought to the fore more crucial issues that warrant discussion in the Hong Kong context about the teaching of the history, role and contribution of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. There is a global narrative emerging on the ethics of citizenship and how to conceive of nations and dignity in light of multiple allegiances and increasingly cosmopolitan identities. It is time that Hong Kong took note of this and teachers begin these important conversations about identity, belonging, respect and equality in the classroom.³⁹ Playing, working and living together in each other's company from early on in a school and neighbourhood environment present the best opportunities for ensuring the development of a healthy appreciation of diversity and the necessary life skills to adapt to different contexts.

B3. Identity and Integration: Obstacles to Applying for Chinese Nationality

Studies reveal that ethnic minorities harbour a very strong sense of ethnic pride although a large proportion of them (63%) also consider themselves a Hong Kong person alongside

their ethnic identity. This represents the hybrid identities characterised by those groups that are second, third and fourth generation ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. This is a major strength and ought to be tapped into to harness the potential of ethnic minority youth and to cultivate in them a sense of shared identity, civic responsibility and the desire to become contributors to Hong Kong's future. This also highlights why the term 'ethnic minority' does not do justice to the self-identification of this group.

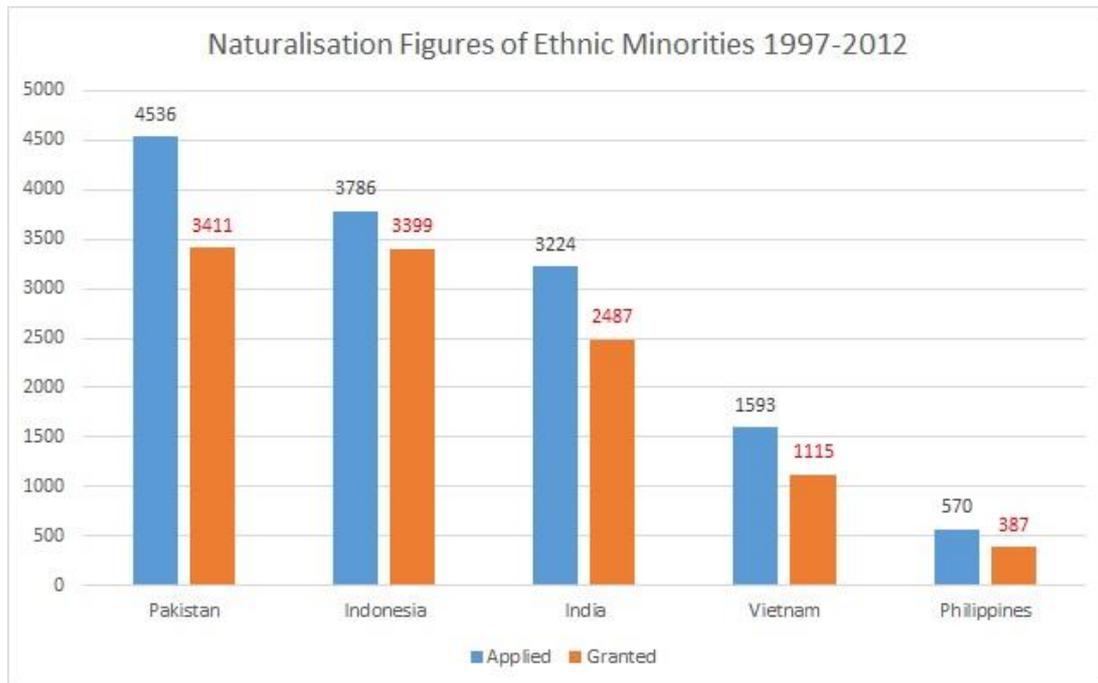
Moreover, the working assumption that school is a neutral place for children to learn the natural order of social interaction on a level playing field is now an outdated notion. Indeed, international literature on education has affirmed that categories such as race, gender, and disability, as socialised in society reproduce mirroring power dynamics in the school setting. In that sense, it is crucial for educators to be mindful of the reproduction of power structures and socialised gendered (and racial) norms at school and to assess the impact these might have on particular population groups. Various studies have shown Asian students to be more resilient than their 'local' counterparts. These findings have been affirmed in the Hong Kong context.⁴⁰ How ethnic minorities rate their subjective levels of life satisfaction is impacted by culture, which has been found to have a strong positive correlation with subjective wellbeing.⁴¹ Ethnic group membership impacts belonging and as well as cognitive processes, emotion, perceptions and behaviour.⁴² Indeed, identification with a minority group is an indispensable tool for coping with stress effectively and has an important bearing on satisfaction levels and wellbeing.⁴³

Identity itself is a complex construct that is layered and dynamic, and in a state of constant flux as an individual interacts with in-groups and out-groups and in different contexts. It is shaped by these social, interactive dynamics and life experiences. Individuals are therefore, embedded in a process of 'identity-matrixing' which is constantly ongoing.⁴⁴ This understanding of identity as open, unstructured and dynamic, yet subjected to the influences of hierarchy, structure and power is crucial in order to design appropriate settings for learning and interaction between children to foster healthy identities that contribute to high levels of life satisfaction and help them develop the necessary tools for resilience and to thrive in leading a fulfilling life.

The research drawn on in Chapter 1 of this Report on Perceptions and Self-Perceptions highlights various aspects of Hong Kong's racism in practice and charts the development of an ethnic consciousness among Hong Kong's ethnic minority population.

Despite being the second or third generation in Hong Kong, it is very hard for some ethnic minorities to apply for Chinese Nationality and the HKSAR Passport. The system is opaque and applicants are rarely notified of the reasons for refusal. One such example was Ms. Bibi Balqees, a Pakistani woman who has resided in Hong Kong for 30 years. She submitted her application to the Immigration Department but was rejected after waiting for a year without being given any express reasons of refusal.

Fermi Wong, Founder and the former Executive Director of Hong Kong Unison commented that one of the two most difficult requirements for ethnic minorities to satisfy was proficiency in the Chinese language.⁴⁵ She has argued that the present regime is unfair as there are examples of foreigners who do not know Chinese at all but are nevertheless granted Chinese Nationality: they include Mr. Allan Zeman, Chairman of Ocean Park and Mr. Michael Rowse, former Director-General of InvestHK. Other ethnic minorities who have experienced the application process said that the standards and requirements seemed to vary from one case to another, making it a frustrating process for them.⁴⁶

Graph 2.3 Total and successful applications by the top 5 ethnic minority nationality groups (1997-2012)

Source: *South China Morning Post*⁴⁷

Since 1997, there were a total number of 15,094 applicants who succeeded in obtaining the Chinese Nationality. As of the latest figures in 2015, Pakistani, Indonesian and Indian account for the top 3 in terms of numbers of successful applicants, representing 4437 (29.4%), 3711 (24.6%) and 3119 (20.7%) people respectively. Each year there are about 1,200 applicants seeking to naturalise as Chinese nationals, however, the Immigration Department has refused to release the figures for unsuccessful applications or the numbers pertaining to specific ethnic groups.

B4. Access to Public Services

In the context of medical care, doctors at public hospitals often fail to understand ethnic minorities fully due to the language obstacles, particularly given the lack of readily available interpretation services. Similarly, there is a failure to understand and appreciate cultural sensitivities pertaining to health-related decisions. This compromises the quality of healthcare that ethnic minorities have access to. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 7 of this Report on the Healthcare Needs of Ethnic Minorities.

An additional but related identity attribute is the important but seldom-discussed role of religion in the lives of some ethnic minority groups. There is a clear lack of research on the breakdown of ethnic minority religious beliefs and as we know religion is an integral part of many people's identities and impacts their life course and decisions, including in relation to family, health, education and care of children and life and death in general.

In the context of burial services, the case of Mariasusai Andrews illustrates the difficulties faced by ethnic minorities. An Indian Christian, he could not secure a cemetery for his wife's ashes despite a six-month search. The family, being Christian, could use the Hindu cemeteries where many Indians are buried. Mr. Andrew's church was not a member of the Chinese Church Alliance, which controls the Christian cemeteries in Hong Kong. The Chinese Permanent Cemeteries rejected Mr. Andrew's application, saying the cemeteries under that organisation only take ethnic Chinese applicants as required by law.

An application to the government-run cemeteries was rejected, and he was informed of this result by a Chinese letter despite his original application being in English.⁴⁸

These intersecting attributes need to be better researched and understood in order to ensure that society does not inadvertently discriminate against, exclude, or suppress these less visible aspects of people's identity.

The lack of access to basic public services due to a lack of information and / or access in a language comprehensible to them imposes a serious burden on the ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong, undermining their human rights and right to equal access to a range of public goods and services and warrants immediate rectification if Hong Kong is serious about its commitment to the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

C. POVERTY AND CRIME

The most undesirable consequences of exclusion in society, particularly where that comes due to prejudice, lack of understanding and cultural barriers are poverty and crime. Poverty is not a choice. Many ethnic minorities work extremely hard to break free from the cycle of intergenerational poverty. However, to achieve this, they need equal and fair access to opportunities to compete and participate in society.

Our system has repeatedly failed ethnic minorities, generations of them now, in multiple spheres, from education, to employment and even their entitlement to enjoy their basic human rights through public services. When all legitimate means are exhausted, some people in society invariably fall prey to engaging in crime, drugs, and other illegal activities out of desperation to survive another day.⁴⁹ However, such experiences also have a deep-rooted link with a sense of marginality, life on the periphery and the exclusion from society. These feelings lead to an overwhelming sense of isolation and disconnectedness from the community. Issues of poverty and crime are explored more fully in Chapters 5 on Poverty and Social Welfare and 8 on Crime and Law Enforcement.

Unfortunately there appear to be more opportunities and reasons for misunderstandings to brew in light of the present context and the realities of discrimination and exclusion that are pervasive in Hong Kong. The minds of many have been soured by experiences that have emphasized the sad truth of Hong Kong's own hierarchical oppression of minorities on grounds of race. Only in a rare few have the struggles of discrimination and how hard they have had to fight to have their voices heard and needs addressed, given birth to an active and engaged citizen who is asking for answers and seeking change. The rest of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities, however, sadly seem to have resigned themselves to this ugly truth about the politics of race in Hong Kong. Although they do not speak up, they have not forgotten. The memories of the unpleasant experiences are rife. These memories need to be replaced with new memories of an inclusive Hong Kong. Through the rebirth of Hong Kong's commitment to its own home-bred immigrants, Hong Kong's ethnic minority population can begin their journey of belonging to Hong Kong as much as it belongs to them.

KEY OBSERVATIONS*General observations on Language*

1. Language is a vital factor in the integration of minority population groups.
2. Language is also the foundation for upward social mobility as it enables access to higher education and professional occupations.
3. Language is also important for access to public or social services.
4. Cultural barriers and other acts of discrimination create a sense of exclusion for many ethnic minorities.
5. The lack of a Chinese as Second Language policy in kindergartens and primary schools turn ethnic minority parents towards the de facto “designated schools” – and the attendant problems of de facto segregation and isolation.

Observations in specific aspects of life

6. The identity of ethnic minorities is often neglected by policymakers e.g. the proposed Moral and National Education curriculum ignores their unique background and identity.
7. Employers often require formal Chinese qualifications, even when it may not be necessary for the job duties.
8. Chinese nationality is often denied to ethnic minorities due to a Chinese language proficiency requirement.
9. In the context of access to public services, the expansion of translation services is to be commended, but there are concerns as to the quality of the translation and professional ethics of interpreters.

Identity and Belonging

10. The exclusion and barriers faced by ethnic minorities negatively impacts their ability to develop feelings of belonging and a healthy sense of self. This impacts their levels of life satisfaction due to the additional challenges they face. Many feel isolated, dislocated and social exclusion, contributing to a poor sense of self and resulting in stress. This has implications for education, health, employment, crime and overall wellbeing. It hinders the development of a positive Hong Kong ethnic identity, as this group most desires to self-identify as.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A comprehensive review of the language policy towards ethnic minorities is needed— particularly in the areas of education, employment and public services.
2. The Chinese as a Second Language framework that is currently being implemented requires regular evaluation and modification in light of feedback and outcomes for ethnic minorities.
3. The existence of the ethnic minority “Hong Konger” needs to be brought into the public consciousness
4. Awareness raising of rights and channels for accountability for violations of their rights among ethnic minorities.
5. High impact approaches to educating Hong Kong Chinese in rights to equality and non-discrimination for all people
6. Enhancing citizenship education for a multicultural Hong Kong, which requires rethinking the role and contributions of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, including how they self-identify, how they develop sentiments of belonging and attachment and a healthy self-concept of ethnic identity. Such a curriculum should also introduce concepts of equality and non-discrimination and the equal dignity and inherent worth of all persons regardless of race, colour, national origin, ethnicity, sex, disability, sexual orientation or other distinctions. It also needs to cultivate a sense of civic duties towards each other and an inclusive and multicultural Hong Kong community as a whole.
7. Create opportunities for inclusive social, political and educational engagement across ethnic groups through facilitated interaction. Go beyond superficial celebrations of festivals and dance. Encourage genuine interest in cultivating understanding.

¹ Jennifer Ngo, ‘Ethnic Minority Pupils ‘Being Set Up To Fail’’, *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 7 July 2013) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1276991/ethnic-minority-pupils-being-set-fail?page=all>> accessed 19 September 2015.

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948 UNGA Res 217 A (III)).

³ This term is used to refer collectively to the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (999 UNTS 171) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (993 UNTS 3), which came into force in 1976.

⁴ Jennifer Ngo and Patsy Moy, 'The young mentors building bridges' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 15 July 2013) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1282664/young-mentors-building-bridges>> accessed 19 September 2015.

⁵ Raquel Carvalho, 'IN PICTURES: Underprivileged children in Hong Kong revisited one decade later' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 18 July 2015) <<http://www.scmp.com/treasures>> accessed 1 August 2015.

⁶ For details please see Chapter 1 of this Report on Perceptions and Self-Perceptions.

⁷ Social Work Department at Chinese University of Hong Kong, 'Survey Results on Racial Discrimination in Hong Kong' (*Chinese University*, 28 October 2005) <<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/cpr/pressrelease/051028e.htm>> accessed 1 August 2015.

⁸ Hong Kong Human Rights Commission and others, 'Views on the Race Discrimination Bill', LC Paper No. CB (2) 1168/ 06-07 (01)' (*Legislative Council*, February 2007) <<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/bc/bc52/papers/bc520303cb2-1168-1-e.pdf>> accessed 1 August 2015.

⁹ Christy Choi, 'Lack of Chinese skills a barrier for minorities' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 14 January 2013) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1127949/poor-chinese-skills-marginalising-locally-born-muslims>> accessed 19 September 2015.

¹⁰ Department of Applied Social Sciences and others, *A Research Report on the Social Situations of Ethnic Minority Women in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong Unison 2007) 40, which reveals that only 6% of ethnic minority victims of domestic violence would seek assistance from the police.

¹¹ Patrick Boehler, 'Hong Kong's ethnic minorities complain of racial profiling by police' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 24 November 2013) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1364083/ethnic-minorities-complain-racial-profiling-police?page=all>> accessed 19 September 2015.

¹² See, for example, Sarah Carmichael, 'Language rights in education: a study of Hong Kong's linguistic minorities' (*Centre for Comparative and Public Law*, November 2009) <https://www.law.hku.hk/ccpl/pub/Documents/Occasional_Paper_19.pdf> accessed 19 August 2015.

¹³ Census and Statistics Department, '2011 Hong Kong Population Census' (*Census and Statistics Department*, 14 May 2015).

¹⁴ See e.g. Rizwan Ullah, 'A critical review on the provision of Chinese language education for NCSS in Hong Kong' (PhD thesis, University of Hong Kong 2012) 131-132.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Carmichael (n 12) 12-19.

¹⁷ Li Yao, 'Struggling to understand' *China Daily* (Hong Kong, 8 November 2013) <http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-11/08/content_15097477_2.html> accessed 19 September 2015.

¹⁸ Ullah (n 14).

¹⁹ Legislative Council, 'Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2013-14, paper no. EDB150' (*Legislative Council*, 2013) <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr12-13/english/fc/fc/w_q/edb-e.pdf> accessed 1 August 2015, 445-449.

²⁰ Oxfam Hong Kong, 'Second-language education policies abroad and in Hong Kong' (*Oxfam Hong Kong*, 2014) <http://www.oxfam.org.hk/content/98/content_18555en.pdf> accessed 1 August 2015.

²¹ Ullah (n 14) 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ Oxfam Hong Kong (n 20) 27.

²⁴ York Chow, 'Ghetto treatment blocks advance of Hong Kong's ethnic minority students' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 26 September 2013) <<http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1317614/ghetto-treatment-blocks-advance-hong-kongs-ethnic-minority>> accessed 19 September 2015.

²⁵ Dennis Chong and others, 'Relieved Ishaq a major star within a minority' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 21 July 2012) <<http://www.scmp.com/article/1007316/relieved-ishaq-major-star-within-minority>> accessed 19 September 2015.

²⁶ Project Yi Jin, targeting Form 5 school leavers and adult learners aged 21 or above, is a scheme to promote "lifelong learning". Students who successfully complete the programme will be awarded a full certificate which has been assessed by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation as comparable to five passes in HKCEE. The medium of instruction of Project Yi Jin courses is Cantonese. Chinese is used for course materials, assignments and examinations. Currently, no special tailor-made courses with English as the medium of instruction are provided for ethnic minorities.

²⁷ Li (n 17).

- ²⁸ *ibid.*
- ²⁹ *ibid.*
- ³⁰ Simpson Cheung, 'Ethnic minority footballers see a straight line to goal at last' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 12 June 2013) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1258664/ethnic-minority-footballers-see-straight-line-goal-last>> accessed 19 September 2015.
- ³¹ *ibid.*
- ³² Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 'Policy Bulletin No. 15: 少數族裔在香港' (*Hong Kong Council of Social Service* 2013) <<http://www.hkcss.org.hk/uploadFileMgmt/pb15.pdf>> accessed on 20 July 2015.
- ³³ See Chapter 5 on Poverty and Social Welfare of this Report.
- ³⁴ Hong Kong Christian Service, '少數族裔青少年希望感與生涯規劃調查' (*Hong Kong Christian Service*, 19 January 2011) <<http://www.hkcs.org/cnews/c340/c340a1.html>> accessed 3 August 2015.
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- ³⁸ Liz Jackson, 'No place in liberal studies for ethnic stereotypes and overgeneralization' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 9 July 2014) <http://www.scmp.com/comment/article/1550397/no-place-liberal-studies-ethnic-stereotypes-and-overgeneralisations>; Shirley Zhao, 'Hong Kong textbooks contain negative stereotypes on cultures and religions, researcher warns' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 23 June 2014) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1538465/textbooks-taking-narrow-view-liberal-studies-hku-researcher-warns>> accessed 19 September 2015.
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- ⁴³ Robert Outten, et al., 'Coping Options: Missing links between Minority Group Identification and Psychological Well-Being' (2009) *Applied Psychology*, 58 (1), 146-170.
- ⁴⁴ Puja Kapai, 'The Doctrine of Substantive Equality and the Democratisation of Diversity' in Michael Kearney (ed.), *From Conflict to Recognition: Moving Multiculturalism Forward*, (Rodopi Press 2012), drawing on Kearney and Adachi's work in the same volume.
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- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ John Carney, 'Figures reveal thousands from ethnic minorities have won naturalization' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 16 December 2012) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1106498/figures-reveal-thousands-ethnic-minorities-have-won-naturalisation>> accessed 28 August 2015.
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