

**Hong Kong Ethnic Minorities Should Not be Asked to Fit the Chinese Mould;  
Social Integration is a Two-way Process**

It is an unquestionable fact that Hong Kong ethnic minorities (EMs) face various challenges, the most prominent one being their inability to socially integrate in Hong Kong. To tackle such a problem, it is often advocated that ethnic minorities should acquire the mainstream language (Cantonese) in order to blend seamlessly into the society. However, I believe social integration is a two-way process which should not be solely restricted to EMs' efforts, but include the local Chinese's initiative in understanding and respecting ethnic differences.

Many Hong Kong EMs face discrimination despite being fluent in Cantonese which indicates that if the local Chinese hold (subconscious or conscious) prejudice against EMs, social integration will not be achieved regardless of how much effort EMs make in learning Cantonese. For instance, reports from SCMP have revealed that certain local Chinese landlords have banned South Asian tenants from renting their properties because apparently, the 'curry smell' is bothersome to Chinese neighbours. Additionally, EMs who teach in local schools and have an excellent command of Chinese tolerate discriminatory language by students where Filipino females and South Asians are addressed by Cantonese derogatory terms such as *bun mui* or 'maid' and *aa caan* or 'locust' respectively, signifying nothing but culturally insensitive and racist attitudes of local Chinese towards EMs. Such examples showcase that EMs remain marginalized and non-integrated despite fulfilling their 'duty' of learning Cantonese. Hence, the issue is primarily rooted in the negative mindsets of local Chinese against EMs which also becomes a hindrance to the attainment of the two-way process of social integration.

The Education Bureau (EDB) should take measures to aid social integration by modifying the History syllabus in schools which will encourage multiculturalism and cultural awareness among local Chinese students. Hong Kong's history has largely ignored the contribution of EMs and thus local Chinese have been ignorant of them. However, there is no reason for that to exist in the 21st century where education is a powerful tool in making people knowledgeable. The EDB should include achievements of Hong Kong EMs such as the fact that Hong Kong's Star Ferry was started by an ethnic minority, so was the Ruttonjee Hospital. Upon including such contributions in the History syllabus of schools, local Chinese will be able to understand ethnic differences and respect EMs which will lead to a more multicultural society where EMs will not be discriminated for following a different religion or eating a different kind of food. Essentially, we are all the same under our skin and such a principle could be understood if the EDB modifies History content to overcome ignorance.

Moreover, Hong Kong public schools should be supported by the government with policy measures to help ethnic minorities bridge up their language skills at mainstream schools so as to avoid learning at a slower rate. A problematic, yet common practice of many schools

with the Chinese medium of instruction is to separate EMs into different classes from the local Chinese students mainly because there is a significant lack of teacher trainings and experienced teachers to provide support to ethnic minorities, including parental communication. Ems are also usually taught from different textbooks which are rather simplified. Nonetheless, such a routine condones isolation as well as causes EMs to learn at a much slower rate and as they progress through the school system, they are inevitably unable to cope with the same Chinese language examinations as their Chinese-speaking counterparts. They are indeed “set up to fail”. Instead, schools should strive for effective learning of EMs through keeping them in a mainstream Chinese-medium classroom and providing them with textbooks that include vocabulary glossaries with romanization, meanings in English and audio recordings of pronunciation. Implementation of such measures will ensure that future generation of EMs grow up with good Chinese language ability, allowing them to integrate into the society.

In summary, social integration is a two-way process between EMs and local Chinese where the focus should not solely be on the former. Social integration should not be restricted to EMs learning the Chinese language but also include efforts by local Chinese to reduce prejudice, enhance inclusion and respect for ethnic differences through modification of History syllabus in schools as well as permitting EMs to learn Chinese with native speakers without class segregation. As EMs continue to make efforts in adopting the local culture, the local Chinese should empathize with them to increase cultural diversity.

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