

Executive Summary

Hong Kong is a multicultural society. According to the 2011 population census, a total of 192,400 people from ethnic minorities were living in Hong Kong. Of these people, 61,400 were South Asians, which is the largest ethnic group in Hong Kong, constituting 31.9% of the ethnic minority population. The growth rate of the ethnic minorities' population is higher than that of Hong Kong as a whole, and this population is relatively young. Ethnic minorities make up an important part of Hong Kong's human capital. It is worth paying attention to whether they can integrate into the community.

Though many of the ethnic minorities who have settled in Hong Kong are native-born, they face many challenges in daily life, including language barriers, low academic qualifications, employment difficulties, as well as religious and cultural differences. These challenges adversely affect the ability of ethnic minorities to integrate, and they also adversely affect the development of Hong Kong's human resources in the long term.

As Hong Kong's population continues to age, the contributions that the younger generations make cannot be ignored. It is worth considering whether the plight of ethnic minorities can be remedied. This study is based on poll interviews with young people across Hong Kong, as well as on individual interviews with both Chinese and ethnic minority youths. With regard to the minority groups, it focuses on South Asians—namely the Indian, Pakistani and Nepali groups—to gain a better understanding of the situations they currently face, including difficulties in studying and living in Hong Kong. This study also examines the attitudes of Chinese youths towards ethnic minorities. At the end of this paper we offer feasible suggestions about how to facilitate the further integration of ethnic minorities into Hong Kong.

Key Findings

- 1. In general, the survey respondents seldom have contact with ethnic minorities. More than 60% indicated they did not have any contact with ethnic minorities in the past year.**

The territory-wide random-sample telephone poll, which was conducted in July to August 2016, yielded 520 responses from young people aged 15 to 34 years old. Of these, 62.7% of respondents indicated they did not have any contact with ethnic minorities in the past year, while 35.4% of them indicated they did.

Among those who had contact with ethnic minorities, 24.6% said they think ethnic minorities are friendly, while 19.9% said they have no feeling towards ethnic minorities.

In addition, the Chinese respondents in the individual interviews reported that the ethnic minorities with whom they have had contact are motivated and highly involved in school life. However, some of the respondents indicated they seldom have contact with ethnic minorities. These respondents reported that they feel strange and that there is social distance between both parties.

2. The respondents' acceptance of ethnic minorities was not high. About 30% indicated they would not often or sometimes choose to sit beside ethnic minorities while traveling on public transport.

The survey showed that 5.9% of respondents would not often choose to sit beside ethnic minorities when traveling on public transport, while 24.1% reported they would sometimes choose not to do this.

In addition, 37.1% and 36.5% of the respondents indicated that they never take the initiative to greet ethnic minorities and also talk with them, respectively. Other respondents, namely 45.3% and 47.6%, indicated that they seldom take the initiative to greet ethnic minorities and also talk with them, respectively.

Regarding the use of derogatory language, 0.8% of respondents reported that they often use derogatory terms to refer to ethnic minorities, while 8.0% indicated that they sometimes do that.

3. The respondents felt better able to accept ethnic minorities as classmates or colleagues than as neighbours, friends, or citizens.

Furthermore, the respondents felt mostly unable to accept ethnic minorities as partners.

On a scale of 0 to 10, the average scores for respondents indicating acceptance of ethnic minorities as classmates or colleagues, neighbours, friends, and Hong Kong citizens were 6.2, 5.7, 5.6, and 5.3, respectively.

Compared to the aforementioned results, it is noteworthy that the respondents indicated feeling less able to accept ethnic minorities as partners, with an average score of 2.3. This figure reveals the fact that respondents are less willing to develop close or intimate relationships with ethnic minorities.

In the individual interviews, the Chinese respondents expressed hesitations about developing intimate relationships with ethnic minorities because of the cultural differences and because of concerns about their families' views. They also expressed worries about not being able to overcome the difficulties of cross-cultural marriages.

4. The respondents indicated a low awareness of the cultural life of ethnic minorities. More than 60% said they know little about minority cultures.

Of the respondents, 64.3% indicated that they know little about the culture of ethnic minorities (0-4 rating), while 9.6% indicated they understand the culture of ethnic minorities (6-10 rating), on a scale of 0 to 10. This item received an average score of 3.3.

From the individual interviews, the Chinese respondents reported they do not have a good understanding of ethnic minorities because they have no direct contact with ethnic minorities. They pointed out that their understanding of ethnic minorities mainly comes from TV programmes.

5. Half of the respondents agreed Hong Kong is an integrated society. More than 40% said they think Hong Kong can accommodate different ethnic groups.

Of the respondents, 55.6% tended to agree (6-10 rating) that Hong Kong is an integrated society, while 15.2% tended to disagree (0-4 rating), on a scale of 0 to 10. This item received an average score of 6.0.

Also, 46.5% tended to agree (6-10 rating) that Hong Kong can accommodate different ethnic groups while 18.0% tended to disagree (0-4 rating), on a scale of 0 to 10. This item received an average score of 5.7.

Main Discussion

- 1. Many ethnic minorities have taken root in Hong Kong and consider Hong Kong their home. They are willing to contribute to society. Hong Kong should provide opportunities to nurture the potential of ethnic minorities so that they can make contributions.**

Between 2001 and 2011, the average growth rate of the South Asian ethnic group in Hong Kong was 4.1% – much higher than the average growth rate for Hong Kong’s general population (0.5%). Many ethnic minorities have taken root in Hong Kong. The attitude that Hong Kong’s people have towards ethnic minorities is an influential factor in whether or not members of the minority communities are able to integrate in daily life and use their strengths to contribute to society.

The individual ethnic minority interviewees indicated they grew up in Hong Kong, consider Hong Kong their home, and are willing to make positive changes to society. Their responses reveal the interviewees’ strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong. If society can provide ethnic minorities with adequate development opportunities and create more favourable living conditions, they will undoubtedly become an important source of human capital and bring benefits to Hong Kong’s development as a multicultural society.

- 2. The situation of “coexistence but non-communion” among the local Chinese and ethnic minorities continues and is detrimental to the long-term development of a multicultural society. Work should be**

done to promote social integration.

From our research, we found that local Chinese and ethnic minorities coexist, but that they have their own separate lives and seldom have contact with each other.

Our research showed that the lack of a common language, negative social stereotypes, lack of access to Chinese people, lack of understanding of each other's culture, and tight networks within ethnic minority communities are obstacles to the integration in the wider community.

The government has stressed all along the importance of building an integrated society. However, there is social distance between local Chinese and ethnic minorities. How to further promote the integration of ethnic minorities into the community is a question that deserves careful consideration.

- 3. Hong Kong youths generally feel neutral towards ethnic minorities. Those who have had contact with ethnic minorities generally have positive perceptions of ethnic minorities. If more contact opportunities are provided between the local Chinese and ethnic minorities, the relationship between the two parties could be strengthened and a better integrated society could be built.**

The survey showed that on a scale of 0 to 10, 31.3% of respondents said they feel positive (6-10 rating) and 28.1% said they feel negative (0-4 rating) towards ethnic minorities. This item received an average score of 5.1.

The individual Chinese interviewees indicated that the ethnic minorities they have had contact with are good people, are motivated, and are highly involved in school life. In addition, the individual Chinese interviewees said they think that having contact with ethnic minorities helps broaden their thinking through understanding other cultures.

These results reflect the idea that providing more contact opportunities

between local Chinese and ethnic minorities can help deepen mutual understanding. The results also show that increasing contact opportunities helps to improve the perception of ethnic minorities held by local Chinese and to strengthen the relationship between the two groups.

4. The first language of Hong Kong is Chinese. Proficiency in the Chinese language is the key to the smooth integration of ethnic minorities into society.

The individual ethnic minority interviewees indicated that learning Chinese is important but difficult. Some experts interviewed pointed out that the difficulty faced by ethnic minorities in learning Chinese is due to the lack of a Chinese context. Ethnic minorities seldom speak Chinese and always use their mother tongue to communicate at home. Meanwhile, most of them study at a designated school¹. It is difficult to create a Chinese context in designated schools and the Chinese that the minorities learn in designated schools is at a simpler level. Even though some ethnic minorities study at mainstream schools, their Chinese remains poor due to the lack of learning support available; this makes them less able to keep up with the learning progress.

The first language of Hong Kong is Chinese. Chinese proficiency not only affects the future development of ethnic minorities, but it is also a key factor affecting whether minorities can successfully integrate into the community. For this reason, it is worthwhile to explore more practicable supplementary measures to enhance minorities' ability to successfully learn Chinese.

5. There are three main difficulties faced by ethnic minorities living in Hong Kong: finding opportunity for further study, finding jobs, and making friends with Chinese people.

Having insufficient Chinese language abilities, ethnic minorities who study in mainstream schools cannot keep up with Chinese language

¹ Designated schools use English as the medium of instruction. The percentage of ethnic minorities attending a designated school is high.

coursework, and they also cannot keep up with other subjects. This decreases their chances for continuing their studies.

In terms of career prospects, the individual ethnic minority interviewees indicated that it is hard to find a job because their Chinese is insufficient and therefore they cannot meet the entry requirements of employers. Other interviewees reported that a discriminatory attitude is another reason for their difficulty in finding a job.

Regarding the social sphere, the individual ethnic minority interviewees indicated that their schoolmates are mainly in the same ethnic group, and thus most of their friends come from the same ethnicity. Other interviewees reported that Chinese people show resistance to have contact with them because of negative perceptions.

If there is no improvement in the living conditions of ethnic minorities, they may experience loss and disappointment, and they may even commit anti-social acts to vent their dissatisfaction. This is detrimental to Hong Kong's overall development.

Recommendations

This study suggests the following recommendations based on the above findings and discussion:

1. Organize large-scale cultural festivals.

Large-scale cultural festivals should be held in minority communities such as the Yau Tsim Mong and Yuen Long districts so as to facilitate contact between the Chinese people and ethnic minorities. The festivals could be art festivals, carnivals, exhibitions, and so on. Ethnic minorities could also be invited to serve as ambassadors to help introduce their culture.

2. The media should produce content about ethnic minorities.

To decrease negative stereotypes and enhance public understanding of ethnic minorities, we suggest that the media produce content highlighting the positive traits and contributions of ethnic minorities in

Hong Kong.

3. To enhance the Chinese-language proficiency of ethnic minorities, we suggest the following:
 - (a) We recommend that the government develop practical, useful e-learning materials so that ethnic minorities can learn Chinese and successfully use the language outside the classroom. The materials should be engaging, and should start from the kindergarten stage.
 - (b) The government should consider setting up a Chinese-language proficiency test as an assessment tool to measure students' competence.