



Town Hall With Matthew Cheung, HKSAR Chief Secretary for Administration 6 November 2017

Points raised from members of the audience

1 You say that all children in Hong Kong are part of Hong Kong. With respect, I beg to differ. The government does not produce an English version of all its publications. There is a distinct paucity of English language materials. The vast majority of non-Chinese who have some knowledge of Chinese have verbal Chinese but may not be able to read and write. If they have the capacity to understand Chinese, it is often poor. In the U.K., they had produced literature 30 years ago - in eight different languages. If you take a look at materials, such as, posters, leaflets, etc., the amount of materials in Chinese, dwarfs what is in English. It would be a small step for the government to produce more of its literature in English.

2 I came to Hong Kong for Primary 4 and did the U.K based GCSE exams. I also tutor Ethnic Minority children on the side. There is a lack of linkage between the local curriculum of Chinese and the GCSE. Many parents say that the Hong Kong government hasn't done much and if possible their children will have to migrate to the U.K to look for jobs. A lot of us tend to live in our own bubbles.

3 We have to look at the long-term prosperity of Hong Kong's young people. Graduates of the international schools here may not be able to get a first job in Hong Kong because they don't have good Chinese, there is a language barrier. Likewise, the ethnic minority children from Yau Ma Tei cannot get on vocational courses. Vocational institutes do offer some funky courses but the medium of instruction is Chinese. The barriers of entry to vocational courses are too great and they are taught and assessed in Chinese. A simple quick fix could be introducing bilateral courses, both industry and institute level.

4 Firstly, I'd like to address the issue of discrimination in Hong Kong: Non-Chinese people have an extraordinary history in Hong Kong, which unfortunately most people don't know about. None of our ethnic minority holidays are celebrated - no Muslim, Sikh or Hindi holidays are celebrated. Very little is known about the role our soldiers played defending Hong Kong against the Japanese. We are 3% of population, but not 3% of teachers or government members. Most people view us as foreigners. I can take that, I'm an adult. But what about our children? The government doesn't promote a picture of Hong Kong as a diverse place to live.

The second point I'd like to address are issues about Child care and child protection. There are real issues faced by ethnic minority children in Hong Kong in child protection and in care. There are not enough ethnic minority social workers. There are not enough Ethnic Minority Social Workers (government welfare department) that make up or equal for child minority services in Hong Kong. Problems are lost in translation literally and figuratively. There needs to be intense

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investigation of child protection services. An example: a few years ago, there was a case regarding a family. A child was born into a diverse family. The mother was an illegal immigrant; however, the child's father was ethnically Chinese. The immigration department did not establish any type of parentage for the child. This family was left in limbo. Eventually, the mother had given him up for adoption. After two years, he had still not been released for adoption because he was not considered a resident of Hong Kong, even though his father was ethnically Chinese. He was about to be cycled into foster care, but fortunately some people were about to care about his case and bring to light the legality aspects. It's very hard for ethnic minority children to get matched in these circumstances. We don't get to break that.

5 We have to use the GCSE/GCE qualifications to enter university. The conversion rate for entering university is not clear enough. We are unaware of how universities allocate admission according to score.

Even when we get the opportunity to study at a university here, it may be hard to integrate into university life if dorm life and other activities are held in Cantonese. Even the medium of instruction is held in Chinese for orientation.

Our Cantonese level is too basic. This is a hurdle for us. It's not that we don't want to learn - it's that we are not given the opportunity to learn.

6 I really want to voice out my opinion about schooling for children, from a mother's perspective. I have a daughter in a mainstream secondary school and twin boys in Kindergarten. Schooling for my daughter was almost like a nightmare. The teachers called twice in 2 weeks to ask my daughter to leave the school. I cannot speak or read Chinese - I lack these skills for employment, and I don't want my daughter to go through the same thing.

The school notices were not in English and I had to ask the school principal many questions. Now it is positive - she feels welcome and she is happy, but I still don't know what exams she will do - it's very confusing for me.

When I applied to kindergarten, a woman came over and asked: 'why are you applying to this school? This is a Cantonese school'. I told her that the reason I am applying is because I can't speak Chinese, that is WHY I am applying. I want my children to get help from the system and learn to read and write.

I think it really has to start from Kindergarten. We have to be able to get the equal opportunity to get the Kindergarten admission. Now my twin boys are in a kindergarten where there are other Ethnic Minority children, as well as Chinese children.

7 I graduated recently and I want to tell you that the Chinese language requirement is unfair. I wanted to study physiotherapy but was not able to get on the course because of the Chinese language requirement. I graduated from university with good grades, but if I want to do a Masters in physiotherapy the Chinese requirement means I can't get to the interview stage. I feel it's

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unfair - I have the passion and the grades - but there is this additional barrier. I understand that the course will also have an internship and an opportunity to interact on a practical basis and I will use Cantonese if needed. Many others want to pursue a certain profession in Hong Kong, but cannot because of the language barrier.

Additionally, I do want to do a two-year masters program in Psychology. How strongly do these universities hold up the requirement for Cantonese? I am able to speak Cantonese on a conversational level. For PolyU, you must be fluent. Even the interviews are held in Cantonese, however, you must be of high speaking proficiency level and fluent.

I've messaged the university and asked how strictly the Chinese language requirement is enforced. I was told I need to be fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin. I have good grades and lots of passion but I can't choose where I want to study because of the language.

8 We are 4th or 5th generation in HK- but the problems have persisted across the years. At kindergarten, we have segregation issues- where the kids are segregated, which is very unfair. The schools separate the kids and always put the ethnic minority kids in the afternoon sessions. I'm happy that the Education Bureau (EDB) is allowing our kids to go into mainstream schools, with eight different schools to choose from. I had to travel to Kwun Tong, Hong Kong for a school. The school had a lack of facilities. The fund for that school needs to be able to help facilitate the students, especially Chinese lessons, etc. However, the extra money is going to homework assistance instead of helping them with Chinese. Where is the money being allocated? How is it assisted? I am happy that you see us as part of Hong Kong's future. But we want to see ourselves in all sectors of society - in the government and in civil service posts. Even hiring staff from overseas is rare, because of the Chinese language barrier.

9 The majority of ethnic minority children are in public schools, so I want to ask what support are our children getting for language support so that they can integrate and be successful and excel? Language is central to many of the children's successes - they need language support so they can feel a part of Hong Kong.

10 We are all Hong Kong people. We must stop stereotyping - it's been fifteen years and school textbooks continue to show people from the Philippines as domestic helpers, and Pakistanis as security guards.

Thanks for the extra funding to schools - but you must set up key performance indicators to see what the money is being used for. We need to monitor how Chinese is taught as a second language - each school is doing their own thing. In other countries, they have specific courses to teach English as a second language. We don't have that. There is no training like that in Hong Kong and this needs to be monitored.

In terms of employability, we need to make sure that the Labour Dept. has ethnic minority staff that communicate with the ethnic minority community to help them find jobs.

11 In primary school, I was automatically sent to a school for non-Chinese speakers. I am taught a

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very basic level of Chinese and will have to leave Hong Kong to find a job. Now I have changed schools, that has a medium of instruction in Chinese, but I am unable to cope. I find it unacceptable and impossible in order to be successful for employment.

About the amount of homework - why is the EDB so cruel and gives us so much homework? I wake up at 6am and sleep at 11pm.

12 Hong Kong is my home and it's an international city but the amount of English being used is getting less. Our children want to speak Chinese, but it's not their fault if they are not able to. It's a vicious cycle for children. What's going on? It's not happening. It's 2017. Ethnic minority children are still going to jail. Even if you want to join the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA), you have to do a Chinese test. Whenever we speak to Carrie Lam and government members- we keep getting lip service - all these meetings are great, but I don't see any response from the government.

Even the media is targeting the salvation and ethnic minorities, in terms of racial profiling and stereotyping in the press (for example, Oriental Daily) - if it was mainlanders that were being stereotyped, LegCo members would stand up for us, but if it's ethnic minorities, the media paints us in a negative light and says things, and the government doesn't step in.

13 I want to start off by saying that good education impacts future opportunities and employment. There is a lack of official documents in English. Our organisation looked at kindergarten Quality Review Reports, which are only available in Chinese. It's through these reports that parents can review the performance of kindergartens. They are very useful to parents. But these reports are not available in English. I've spoken to the Education Bureau regarding this, and there were only excuses given.

Children in the ethnic minority community are described as 'foreigners' instead of being considered 'local'. This is written in kindergarten circulars. But they are local too. This is the beginning of their education and there is already a distinction being made.

For many primary schools - all the ethnic minority children have to stay behind after school, to do compulsory Chinese, because it's not part of the curriculum. There are no resources during school time.

Referring to the 'One Belt One Road Initiative' - I have university students tell me they want to join the exchange programme, they are qualified and talented but cannot join because of the language requirement and barrier.

14 I want to address issues revolving around public service and family. My children are third generation. My husband's children are fourth generation. There needs to be a true infrastructure for society, family and government. We want equal opportunities but even for the most menial jobs there is a Cantonese requirement, for example, child care workers or senior officials. There is no opportunity for us to serve if we don't have the Cantonese requirement. We do want to support you.

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We want to support strengthen families with access to early intervention care for children. Even Chinese children must wait or 2 or 3 years to be assessed, but if they don't speak Chinese social support is simply not available and they can't access support. Additionally, the treatment is inadequate.

Our child protection system is not strong enough. We have to increase the support for foster families. The Child Protection system is not strong enough. The system does not have a plan of the children, the quality of care is not good either. The support for non-Chinese speaking children is also weak. The children end up going into care and staying there forever. This is especially true for children who are being abused and neglected, because the police can't intervene and help. We must find a way to support non-Chinese children from the government and public services. We must also find a way to strengthen families.

15 I have 2 children - one has special needs. We would like a truly diverse and inclusive society. We have to build a diverse society for Hong Kong, especially for the children. There needs to be an audit completed on both public and private schools. If these schools can afford to have swimming pools then they can afford to hire an experienced special educational needs (SEN) teacher. There needs to be research done within the DSS sector. Are the funds being used appropriately in schools? These really require an audit. Consider the ratio in which this community is excluded from schools. There are around 520,000 public school students. Approximately 7% have special needs. Do these 7% represent Hong Kong? Ethnic Minorities are truly underrepresented. ONLY 5% of the Ethnic Minority community are represented. Schools are not accommodating this. The numbers don't represent the true fact. Support should be much better.

16 My family have been in HK for over 100 years. There were generations who were victims because of segregation in the designated schools and government policies. They didn't allow ethnic minorities to learn Chinese. Actually, ethnic minorities are not lazy - many of us do read and write Chinese. Non-Chinese speakers are also a part of Hong Kong. We want to integrate, but what is HK government doing to help? Mr. Cheung said our children are part of future of HK - in other counties so many ethnic minorities are working in the police, working at the airport and in parliament, but not in HK. Without words, it's nothing. There needs to be action.

The government will not give me Hong Kong passport - why? What criteria do they use to give out passports?

About discrimination - this problem has not been resolved, even with Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). It takes years to go through the investigation process and then there is really nothing they can do. My sister did advanced nursing but then was discriminated against - so are we really an international city? It took years to go through the complaints process - but finally it was no help.

17 We never used to have support centre for ethnic minorities - now we do we have centres to help them and we hope they will integrate into society.
Many ethnic minority kids are living in subdivided flats, we hope the government will look at the

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housing situation and give them more space.

We want to have a standard application process for civil servants..

18 We are the only company to have a flagship programme for ethnic minority students. It is a positive project and we hope others will learn from our experience. We have internships for ethnic minority students and a programme of long term mentoring. We have found that this is good for our Chinese staff too. They have a chance to learn how to work with people of different cultures, as well as being educated about topics, such as stereotyping, etc. Now we find that our staff are super excited when we get new interns. They do want to learn more about different populations within Hong Kong, for example, the Indian and Pakistani population. English language is a priority for us and we want to make sure that we have the right people in our company. Other hotels are now looking at our example and are interested in hiring ethnic minority students.

19 A lot of ethnic minority students in local schools are wrongly diagnosed with speech delays. This is because the assessments were carried out in Cantonese. They end up carrying these diagnoses with them throughout their school career. This can hurt their self-esteem. We would appreciate more culturally sensitive and language appropriate assessments for non-Chinese children.

20 We need help to look after Hong Kong's most vulnerable children and female migrant workers. When domestic helpers get pregnant, they are fired. They lose access to health care and welfare. I believe we are talking about linguistic minorities, not ethnic minorities. It's to do with language, not race. Most migrant nations across the world are able to absorb migrants - this is to do with language.

Pathfinders has helped over 5000 women and children that nobody else could help. Every single one was an ethnic minority, but not a linguistic minority. Of the 5000, 2,177 are babies aged between 0 and 2. All have issues accessing education, healthcare and the justice system. Some of the children, the very poorest are undocumented and may also have special needs. I was horrified to find the waiting list for assessment is now 11,000 children long (Child Development Centre).

Pathfinders children are not helped by the government. They have no voice to speak here tonight. I'm talking on behalf of them. They are ethnic minority but not always linguistic minorities. Some of them have special needs.

An example of the work we do: A woman was given a baby boy to look after - the mother handed the boy to her, walked away and didn't return. She took him to the police station - they said they couldn't help because he was undocumented. She took him to an orphanage. They said he's probably got AIDS and wouldn't accept him. Then they took him to the hospital, so he could have the tested - he was physically healthy but undocumented. He was physically restrained to not disturb other children. I was concerned. Where would he stay after this? I called Alia at Mother's Choice and asked her to take him.

21 Hong Kong calls itself an international city, but it can be very difficult to find Halal food here.

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I'm a kindergarten teacher and also a student. I speak fluent Chinese but they won't hire me because the kids might be scared of me. There is an issue of discrimination. I believe that it's something in the books that they give people. Not all Muslims are from ISIS. It needs to start with education.

22 We've had all the titles and labels - I would like to talk about our sense of identity. Are ethnic minorities locals or foreigners? Can I identify as Hong Kong Chinese? If so, will I be able to serve in the military? I've been to a designated school - I consider myself a Hong Konger. China is a very diverse place. I was born and raised in Hong Kong, but I have to defend myself when I identify myself as Hong Kong Chinese. Will the government provide education to Hong Kong Chinese and ethnic minorities - everyone can be a Hong Konger. Any colour. Any race.

23 We hope you will take asylum seekers into consideration. Asylum seekers in Hong Kong are mostly from South East Asia. They don't have access to a steady income. They are a vulnerable population and they are in limbo, between having refugee status and being fully integrated into Hong Kong.

24 We need the words to become practical reality. We need action. I will give you an example of a man at the Pakistan Consulate. His son has special educational needs (SEN). I recommended him some education institutions, such as Ebenzers. The official will have to send him back to Pakistan because his needs cannot be met here.

Post 1997 there was an overnight shift and now talent is ignored just because of the language.

All the non-Chinese speaking ethnic groups should be given due respect and able to join the civil service, for example, according to potential, aptitude, etc.

25 When we approached the schools here - the schools said, 'if the children don't speak Cantonese, don't apply, you should not bother.' My wife applied for a teaching job, the school principal said she 'could join but would have to remove her headscarf'. We went to Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and received \$500 HKD compensation.

26 I want to talk about the human rights of the child in Hong Kong.

Recently, a lawyer was defending an asylum-seeking family. If the issue was not resolved quickly, the mother and child may have been separated. Mother and child are both traumatised at the thought of this separation. What will that mean? The child will get put into care. Will the child get the right for an education? In court, the lawyer brought up the fact that the child has some rights to education but the barrister said this "Charter of Rights" has not been embedded in the rule of law and does not stand up in court.

27 What is life like as an ethnic minority child from a broken family in a situation of poverty and with experience of family abuse or domestic violence? There is no institution or body of professionals, that can deal with this kind of case. There is no way to assess the needs of these

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children and these groups. We need to have an evidence based and data based approach to deal and look after these children. At the moment, there is an information deficit; we are misinformed.

28 Hong Kong is a high reward place. We can either recreate a culture that is basically Chinese or we can hope Hong Kong remains a global city. We need civilisation. For this we need to consider how we treat the vulnerable members of our community. For example, the poor racial minorities - if you are poor and you are a racial minority or any other things that stigmatise you, for example mental health problems - then you are in trouble.

Where is this going to go? Do you want us to maintain our uniqueness and be civilized? There is a monetary value to that. Hong Kong should remain a viable financial city but you won't get that unless you retain a degree of civilisation. Currently people are stigmatized by poverty, mental health needs and that doesn't work. You will be on your own. People won't want to move here.

29 All the problems that we are discussing today have been raised before and have been ignored. A Children's Commission will need independent members or investigators.

30 We need equal opportunity in healthcare. Ethnic minorities come to us because clinics are in English or Chinese, there is a language barrier and they are not able to see a doctor. Usually the doctors or nurses ask them to bring in a relative for translation purposes. This is unideal because of confidentiality issues.

For example, HPV vaccinations are not reachable to ethnic minorities and this impedes public health.

Chinese speaking citizens and the local community need to be culturally sensitive toward ethnic minorities. Currently some people go back to Pakistan to see the Doctor. They are flying back to their home countries instead of accessing local services.

Opportunities for ethnic minorities are needed in the health care professionals.

There are social determinants of health and good health is giving everyone the opportunity to be who they want to be.