# The India Association Hong Kong

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The Hon Mr John KC Lee GBM SBS PDSM
Chief Executive of the HKSAR
Office of the Chief Executive
The Government of the HKSAR

19 August, 2025

By email (ceo@ceo.go.hk and
(policyaddress@cepu.gov.hk)

Dear Chief Executive,

**2025 Chief Executive Policy Address**

The India Association Hong Kong would like to submit our policy proposals for your forthcoming Policy Address.

In doing so, we are responding to the invitation you made during the Policy Address Consultation Session on Social Welfare held on 16 July 2025 to provide detailed suggestions on Chinese language education for ethnic minorities. We also make some additional suggestions in relation to employment, care for the elderly, integration and racial harmony.

## Overview

Approximately HK$400 million a year has been spent annually over the last decade or so to support Chinese learning for ethnic minority students. Despite this sizeable investment, we understand that only 5.7% of ethnic minority candidates in the last set of HKDSE exams entered for the Chinese language paper. Moreover, many ethnic minority students are in schools with a very high proportion of ethnic minority students, sometimes over 70%, and therefore lack the language input to achieve high Chinese standards. Addressing this issue through a more effective use of public resources is important for at least four reasons.

**First**, most of us in the Indian and other ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong view this city as home and have done so for generations. Because Hong Kong is home, the young in our respective minority communities need to be employable here.

**Second**, our suggestions are made not only for the benefit of our own communities but for Hong Kong as a whole. The size of the non-Chinese

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community in Hong Kong varies between approximately 4% and 8% depending on whether or not you include temporary workers. This is too large a group to be unable to contribute to the economy and potentially become dependent on public welfare.

**Third**, we are living in difficult times geopolitically. It is essential that all of us, regardless of race, religion or national origin regard ourselves as part of not just this great city, but also the broader nation as a whole. It is the Chinese language that will link us to the rest of the nation and therefore so important for ethnic minorities to learn.

**Finally**, we note that innovations in teaching Chinese to ethnic minorities will likely also be transferrable to other important issues, such as integrating the children of Mainland talent into Hong Kong schools.

## Causes of the problem

Diagnosing the causes of the problem is the first step in determining the appropriate solution. In particular, any proposals need to address the reality that:

1. Non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students simply cannot get enough exposure to the Chinese language in their home environment. Parents of NCS students recognise the importance of Chinese in Hong Kong but simply do not have the language skills (and also often lack the financial resources) to help their children.

2. Whilst the official system of designated schools has been abolished, many of the former designated schools continue to have most of their pupils coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. This is clearly detrimental to their Chinese learning as it exacerbates the lack of exposure to Chinese in their home environments.

3. Whilst there are now a lot of inexpensive technological tools (particularly for Mandarin) to assist children to from NCS families to learn Chinese, knowledge of these tools is not widespread and families are left to fend for themselves.

4. Many ethnic minority students we have spoken to who beat the odds and acquired strong Chinese language skills at primary school have told us that they were discouraged from continuing onto DSE Chinese, presumably to avoid bringing down the school's grade averages. Instead, they are pushed towards relatively weak overseas curricula. Whilst we cannot verify this directly, it is a story we hear repeatedly and one which is consistent with the data.

In formulating our suggestions, we have had regard to not only the experiences of members of our own community but have also considered the views of other interested parties. In particular, we have had regard to the submissions on this subject made by the EOC in August 2024 and the EOC's report "Closing the Gap" issued in September 2019.

1. **Encouraging integration of minority students in the mainstream student population**

We are given to understand that there are 17 primary schools and 15 secondary schools in which more than 50% of the students are from non-Chinese backgrounds and 9 primary schools and 7 secondary students study in schools where a majority of their classmates are from non-Chinese speaking schools where this proportion exceeds 70%. Put another way, just under half of ethnic minority backgrounds. Addressing this, perhaps through changes in the funding mechanism is key to addressing the learning difficulties. The current funding mechanism (as set out in Education Bureau Circular No. 8/2020) provides incentives to increase the enrolment of NCS students which leads to the undesirable outcome of NCS students being concentrated in a small number of schools.

2. **Support for Chinese language learning**

The following tools provide significant support that can help achieve high levels of fluency. These and similar products should be publicised to ethnic minority families who are seeking to support their children to learn Chinese. Some of these materials primarily support learning Mandarin and could be adapted with government support for Cantonese. We provide particular product names only to give examples of the resources that are available rather than to promote them. We would be delighted to see this list expanded with any competing products that are available.

- Reading materials with audio support. Examples for younger children include the Luka reading robot, Basic Chinese 500 (Sagebooks) and the Le Le Chinese Reading System. Examples for older children include the "Sunny Campus" student newspaper (published by Sing Tao Group), Top 945 magazine and the Youdao reading pen.

- Apps and games which help our children learn how to write characters. Examples include Skritter and Maomi Stars.

- Tutors who support their language acquisition by engaging in regular everyday conversation with them. We understand that individual tuition may not be cost effective but there is no reason why after-school support cannot be provided in larger groups.

3. **Incentivising secondary schools to support the Chinese learning of ethnic minority students**

There are many possible solutions to the current culture of discouraging ethnic minority students from taking DSE Chinese.
A basic and easy change would be to discourage students who have been educated in Hong Kong from a young age from taking easy foreign exams such as GCSE Chinese. Whilst such a qualification might be appropriate for children of Hong Kong permanent residents who move to the city in their teenage years, it is not a sensible option for those who have been schooled in local primary schools. If a foreign qualification is to be taken, students who have grown up in Hong Kong should be encouraged to take Chinese at GCE Advanced Level or equivalent rather than GCSE. Even better would be to encourage NCS students to take Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students).

Another possibility would be to allow NCS students to take a simplified version of the HKDSE (Chinese Language). The current version requires a native level of proficiency plus a high level of knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture and traditions for certain parts of the curriculum. This is difficult for an NCS student to achieve. If the cultural component could be separated into a separate optional paper that could be attempted only by those seeking the highest grades, it might allow ethnic minority students to at least achieve a pass at HKDSE (Chinese Language).
Importantly though, it should be publicised to ethnic minority families and schools that it is the right of all students to continue with their Chinese studies following the local curriculum and that it is against public policy to persuade students who wish to attempt the Chinese language portion of the local curriculum from doing so. We are convinced that with the appropriate support, there is no reason why ethnic minority students cannot achieve results in Chinese that are similar to those in the majority population. Children of Chinese immigrants to English speaking countries often achieve native level fluency in English and there is no reason why the reverse should not also be true.

**Employment**

Hong Kong's ethnic minority communities are particularly vulnerable to job losses during the coronavirus pandemic. This was a symptom of a wider problem which will persist given the increased focus of the economy on the Greater China region, unless action is taken. We would propose the following:

- Enhance the available resources at the Labour Department to assist those who are not fluent in Chinese.
- Design courses for youth not fluent in Chinese to help them enter other industries such as accounting, marketing, design and maintenance.
- We suggest efforts should also be taken to ensure the availability of vocational training courses in English as well as Chinese as many adults who are not fluent in Chinese are unable to access the existing vocational training courses.
- We would also like to see Chinese language courses for adult non-ethnic Chinese become more accessible and better publicised. For instance, information could be disseminated through organisations associated with Hong Kong's various ethnic communities, including our own.
- We recognise the importance of a trilingual and biliterate civil service but hope that the Government will lead by example and hire more non-ethnic Chinese Hong Kong people into the civil service. We welcome the on-going review of language proficiency requirements since 2010 which has led to 53 civil service language requirements being lowered and urge that this process continue.
- We also suggest that we consider the experience of other bilingual jurisdictions such as Canada where each civil service position is analysed to consider whether bilingual proficiency is required. Even where bilingual proficiency is required, consideration is given to whether language requirements must be met at the time of appointment or satisfied later through language training at government expense.

- We say this not just because it is desirable that the composition of the civil service should look like Hong Kong. In addition, there may be particular benefits in increasing cultural diversity in certain departments such as the Police, Customs and Immigration which frequently deal with individuals from different ethnic background.

**Care of the aged**

Members of the ethnic minority communities consider Hong Kong their home. Therefore many ethnic minority elderly are spending their twilight years in Hong Kong. Of these, most have extreme difficulty in Mainstream Elderly Homes for the following reasons:

1. Linguistic needs as many are not fluent in Chinese, some are not fluent in English.

2. Dietary needs both in terms of usual cuisine and sometimes specific needs for instance for Halal or vegetarian food.

3. Religious needs for instance with respect to prayer rooms or accommodating fasts.

4. Cultural needs which in part reflect the language abilities referred to above but also impact entertainment and activities for the residents concerned.

We therefore urge that the Administration give thought to the following:

- In the short-term, to improving access to information on care homes for ethnic minority elderly in English and other languages. For instance, the Social Welfare Department website (in English) provides a list of elderly community centres and a list of care homes but there does not appear to be a link to the websites and no information on what services are provided or how to apply.

- In the longer-term, to consider whether it is possible to designate an elderly care home or a section within a few care homes to cater for the non-Chinese speaking communities of Hong Kong.

**Integration and Racial Harmony**

There is much yet to achieve to foster integration and racial harmony in society. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- Publicity campaigns should be run showing pride in a diverse Hong Kong.

- Training courses among frontline staff in the civil service should be formulated to promote understanding of the various cultures of different ethnic minorities.

- Information about different cultures and religions should be incorporated into the education curriculum.

**Conclusion**

We make these suggestions because of our community's long history in Hong Kong and our recognition of the important role our city plays in the nation and internationally.

We are convinced that Hong Kong's best days are yet to come. Hong Kong's Indian and other ethnic minority communities hope to play a part in the exciting opportunities that will be created going forward by increased integration with the Greater Bay Area and the rest of the country.
We are confident that under your leadership, Hong Kong will develop policies that ensure that each and every resident can perform to their potential and, equally importantly, contribute to a city of which we are all proud.

Yours sincerely,



**Mohan Chugani M.H.**
**President**
**The India Association Hong Kong**