



**Hong Kong Unison's Submission to SCOLAR
Enhancement of Chinese Language Education for EM people in HK
June 2010**

I) Foreword

Since the handover, ethnic minority (EM) people in Hong Kong has been facing a much difficult position, partly due to the increasing usage and importance of Chinese language in different areas of lives, such as education and employment. For instance, the Government has included Chinese language as one of the core requirement for application of civil service posts. As a consequence, almost none of our EM residents could enter the civil service since 1997. (NB: The Government has not kept any statistics. However, if one had chance to talk to our EM communities, it was not difficult to find out they consider themselves “hopeless” in joining the civil service.)

Established in 2001, Hong Kong Unison has been advocating for equal opportunities for EM people. We believe everyone is equal regardless of their race. We all should be given chance to realize their potential. Given that EM communities have been a part of Hong Kong since colonial times (NB: many of them settled in Hong Kong for generations.), we believe our Government has obligations to help them enhancing their Chinese language proficiency, so that they could participate fully in the society.

We consider enhancing Chinese language proficiency for EM people not only beneficial to racial equality and harmony, but also a worthy investment. On the one hand, the birth rate of EM people in Hong Kong is much higher than that of Chinese people. If quality education was provided to them, including Chinese language learning, they could be a valuable manpower force in future, helping to relieve our aging problem. On the other, a more inclusive environment would help our EM people to make use of their unique advantage, i.e., being able to master a number of languages and different culture, so that they could make more contributions to the economy and society.

In fact, the Government has allocated resources to help EM people learning Chinese in recent years. We were especially delighted to witness the Financial Secretary's announcement of a special measure in this year's Budget speech, that HK\$500 million would be injected into the Language Fund to upgrade language proficiency for Hong Kong population, including EM people. However, besides long-term commitment, it is also important for the Government to make good use of the money, i.e., those new resources and projects should be pointed to the genuine needs of EM communities. It is against this background that we request a meeting with you, as the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), and submitted this paper.

In this paper, we will briefly introduce the problems of EM people, including students, working youth and adults in learning Chinese, as well as the inadequacies of current systems. Some concrete suggestions would be made, both at policy and implementation levels. Hopefully, it could help your Committee to work out a long term and effective strategy in helping EM people and other non-Chinese people learning Chinese language.



II) Current situation

a) Chinese language education for EM students in elementary education

One of the key issue is the Government has kept on refusing adopting a *“Learning Chinese as a second language policy”*, with tailor-made and systematic curriculum for EM students, despite repeated requests from a wide range of parties including education sector, concern groups, law makers¹ and even the international society². The Education Bureau (EDB) kept on saying that the curriculum Chinese curriculum is suitable to EM students, so long as certain adaptations have been made. The reality is teachers in primary and secondary schools have been struggling in developing their own curriculum and teaching materials, without adequate references and support. In fact, a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Unison and the Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union in July 2007 (see **Appendix 1**) found that about 75 % of teachers found the current central Chinese curriculum designed for local Chinese students was not suitable to NCS (non-Chinese speaking) students.

The EDB published *the Supplementary Guideline to the Chinese Language Curriculum for non-Chinese Speaking students* in November 2008. In addition, 25 designated schools have been granted a special allowance of \$300,000 to \$600,000, to help them to develop school based Chinese language education for NCS students. Yet, these piece-meal measures could hardly facilitate effective Chinese language teaching and learning for NCS students.

On the one hand, the Guide itself does not provide those concrete support that teachers genuinely need, i.e., tailor-made curriculum for NCS students, coupled with relevant teaching materials and assessment tools. On the other, the allowance is only given to a small portion of schools admitting EM students. In contrast, there are over 500 primary and secondary schools admitting EM students received nothing from the Government, not even a cent.

To make matter worse, the Government has never informed explicitly about the criteria to be “designated school”, such as the ratio of EM students in the school. According to Government statistics, there are schools having EM students up to a ratio of as high as 56-83%, but have still not been categorized as designated schools. On the other hand, it is also not clear that how the amount of cash allowances is calculated. For instance, in 2008/09, two high schools took in 792 and 91 EM students respectively. Yet both of them received the same amount of allowance, i.e., \$600,000.

To sum, lack of a suitable curriculum; together with inadequate support to schools and teachers; attributed to ineffectiveness of Chinese language education to EM students in Hong Kong. Up until now, most of students could only end up at GCSE Chinese level, which is not

¹ On November 2009, the Legislative Council unanimously passed a motion calling for the strengthening of Chinese language education to EM students, including development of tailor-made textbook and assessment tools, as well as introduction of a Chinese benchmark test for EM people in Hong Kong. During the debate, legislators from different parties spoke for the introduction of a “Learning Chinese as a second language policy”.

² In its concluding observations and recommendations to China report 2009, The CERD Committee of the United Nations urged the HKSAR Government to develop a “Learning Chinese as a second language policy” for EM and other non-Chinese speaking people in Hong Kong.



good enough to compete for further studies³ and labour market⁴. A recent report from South China Morning Post revealed that a Pakistani young man, who got an A* in GCSE Chinese Examination, was considered not good enough in Chinese language proficiency, in his application to police post. (See Appendix 2)

b) **Chinese language education for post-secondary students and adults**

It should be noted that systematic Chinese language education has only provided to EM students in Hong Kong since 2004. As a result, many of our EM residents, including those studying at post-secondary institutions and joining the labour market, did not have chances in learning Chinese when they were at primary and secondary schools. Their low Chinese language standard would certainly limit their choices for jobs and further studies. Bear in mind that the Government has recognized GCSE Chinese qualifications in civil service recruitment. Yet given lack of such learning and education opportunities in the private market, these people could hardly be benefited from the new measure.

In the past few years, the Government has allocated resources, enabling the Employment Retraining Board and social welfare agencies to provide Chinese language enhancement classes for EM residents in Hong Kong. Yet almost all of these classes, including those conducted by four language support centres in Hong Kong, are focused on spoken Chinese, i.e., Cantonese. We consider these classes beneficial to those EM new arrivals in Hong Kong. Yet for those who have born or settled in Hong Kong for a considerable period, what they need are some formal or award bearing Chinese classes, which also include reading and writing skills, and enable them to enhance their Chinese level on gradual basis. At the end of the day, what they learn must be connected to their career or study needs, i.e., a formal Chinese language qualification widely recognized by employers and teaching institutions.

To achieve the above purpose, Hong Kong Unison has organized the first GCSE Chinese Examination preparation course for EM youth and work adults in last year. Without much publicity, we have enrolled 25 students from different ethnic origins, including Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese and Thais. We have a number of full-time post-secondary students, while others are working in civil service, education, social service, information technology, hotel and catering sectors respectively (See Appendix 3).

Obviously, there is a loophole in the provision of Chinese language education to EM people in Hong Kong, i.e., EM youth and adults are neglected. As a NGO focusing on policy advocacy and public education, we do not have manpower and resources to continue running such course. It is necessary for the Government to take in, for instance, they could assign teaching institutions such as Vocational Training Council and Employment Retraining Board to conduct such training.

³ Since 2008, the University Grants Committee has recognized a pass in GCSE Chinese Exam as an alternative Chinese language requirement for admission to university programs under JUPAS. Yet many departments in universities still set a higher admission requirement in Chinese language proficiency, thus limited EM students' study choices.

⁴ Since late 2008, the Government has recognized a grade D in GCSE Chinese Exam as an alternative Chinese language requirement for application to non-degree civil service posts. Yet individual departments, such as the Hong Kong Police Force could still added additional requirement in Chinese language proficiency, which has in effect shut the door for EM applicants.



Nevertheless, given its limited level, GCSE could only serve as a starting point for our EM people learning Chinese. The Government still needs to formulate a **“Learning Chinese as a second language policy”**, i.e., to provide tailor-made and systematic curriculum, so that they could enhance their Chinese gradually. In the long run, we consider it is necessary to introduce **a benchmark test**, as endorsed by the Legislative Council during a motion debate held last November, so that all the non-Chinese people could sit in the test and gain a Chinese qualification widely recognized by employers, as well as the community as a whole.

Given the increasing importance of Chinese economy and its close connections to the outside world, we consider the formulation of **a “Learning Chinese as a second language policy”** not only beneficial to South Asians and South-east Asians in Hong Kong, but also other non-Chinese speaking people who are living or doing business here. In the long run, we saw a good potential for Hong Kong to become a regional learning centre of Chinese language in South China.

III) What we advocate

a) Chinese language education for EM students in elementary education

- To formulate **“a policy of learning Chinese as a Second Language”** with a systematic Chinese curriculum that runs through whole study period, i.e., from kindergarten to Form Six. Learning objectives (i.e. the Chinese level that could be attained) should be set in each learning stage (such as P.1, P.6, and F.3) as accord to levels of students, so as correspondent assessment tools;
- To provide suitable teaching materials and effective pedagogies to teachers so as to facilitate effective learning;
- To organize **“outreaching tutorial services to schools”** for EM students with language tutorials in Chinese, so that they will not lose their drive for learning because their Chinese proficiency continuously lags behind that of others. We consider retired teachers as a valuable manpower force. In addition, we prefer teaching institutions, but not welfare NGOs, to run these services, given their expertise, as well as the high staff and administrative cost involved in the latter’s case);
- To enhance school teachers' understanding of cultural diversity and to recognize the specialty in teaching Chinese as second language in multi-cultural context;
- To explicitly inform about the criteria for defining a **“designated school”**. In addition, such schools should be required to have adequate qualified teachers and other facilities in order to teach and support EM students;



- To explicitly inform that what guidelines or principles are adopted for the calculation of the amount of special allowance granted to designated schools, in which should include the setting of the amount of allowance in accordance to number of students so as to ensure needs of schools are met;
- To provide extra supports and cash allowance to mainstream schools (non-designated schools) admitting EM students;
- In order to have a genuine understanding of the learning situation of EM students in mainstream schools, we propose the EDB or SCOLAR to commission academicians or experts to conduct a large-scale study on difficulties and needs of EM students in learning Chinese;

b) **Chinese language education for EM youth and adults**

- To promote GCSE Chinese qualification among EM communities. The best way is to strictly implement the policy of accepting GCSE Chinese as an alternative Chinese qualification in civil service recruitment. Additional Chinese language requirement should not be applied unless with genuine occupational needs;
- To promote GCSE Chinese qualification among employers and business sector. Measures could be taken to urge employers to recognize such qualification;
- To provide resources to teaching and training bodies, so that they could strengthen teacher training and organize GCSE Chinese Examination preparation courses to EM youth and adults, as well as other non-Chinese speaking people, in a price that they could afford. Again we prefer teaching and training bodies, instead of welfare NGOs, to run such training;

c) **Overall policy**

- To formulate a “*Chinese language benchmark test*” suitable for all non-Chinese speaking people, so that schools and other teaching institutions can use it as teaching goal and various sectors can also assess their proficiency in Chinese accordingly;
- To explore the possibility of developing Hong Kong as a regional Chinese language learning centre in South China;