Multiculturalism with Hong Kong Characteristics

A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Hong Kong (a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China) is promoted as "Asia's World City" due to its interconnectivity, East-meets-West geopolitical orientation, and composition of migrants from both Asian and non-Asian countries. Hong Kong-based scholars have suggested that Hong Kong's policy towards the social inclusion of non-Chinese communities is ambiguous. For example, the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) lacks an informative description of racial discrimination, which may lead to shortcomings in ethnic minority protections under the current social policy for integration (e.g., ethnic minorities' experiences related to religious discrimination). Most of the non-White ethnic minority population of Hong Kong consists of low-income South Asians and Southeast Asians, with some ethnic groups (e.g., Nepalese) reported to reside in socially segregated districts. Furthermore, scholars have highlighted that current social policy in Hong Kong appears to be partially or completely different from Western-based approaches to multiculturalism, necessitating further examination to promote social inclusion. To fill this gap, this study explores the perspectives of Chinese and non-Chinese individuals regarding multiculturalism in Hong Kong. The study adopts a qualitative research design and includes interviews with twenty ethnically Chinese and non-Chinese teachers serving minorities in Hong Kong. Three themes emerge in this study: 1) a general understanding of multiculturalism as diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds, mutual understanding and acceptance, and inclusive social harmony and social justice; 2) perceptions of Hong Kong-based multiculturalism and the perceived hierarchy of ethnic groups; and 3) the main differences between Western and Hong Kong-based multiculturalism, including more acceptance of diversity in the West and geographic location. In sum, this study provides recommendations to ensure a respectful and ethical inclusion of non-White ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, such as developing a tailor-made policy.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Ethnic Minorities; Hong Kong; Reduced Inequalities; Social Policy; Social Inclusion; Social Harmony; Social Justice

Introduction

Hong Kong (a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China), functions under the "one country, two systems" form of governance. Hong Kong is promoted as "Asia's World City" and has been home to individuals and communities from diverse

ethnic backgrounds for decades. Based on the latest statistics from the Census and Statistics Department (2016), non-Chinese individuals—also referred to as ethnic minorities—in the Hong Kong context constitute 8% of the total population and include Indonesians (26.2%), Filipinos (31.5%), Whites (10.0%), Mixed race/ethnicity (11.2%), Indians (6.2%), Pakistanis (3.1%), Nepalese (4.4%), Japanese (1.7%), Thais (1.7%) and Koreans (1.1%) in Hong Kong's population (7.5 million).

Ethnic minorities have been residing in Hong Kong and growing in number since Hong Kong's British colonial years (1841–1997). Nguyet J. Erni and Lisa Y. Leung (2014) point out that most ethnic minorities from South Asian backgrounds worked in the government or the army during this period, and English was a medium of instruction and widely spoken during the British colonial period. After Hong Kong's handover to the People's Republic of China (P.R. China) in July 1997, the medium of instruction primarily became Chinese (Cantonese), and English was spoken less frequently (Erni and Leung, 2014). Due to the differences between Chinese and the mother tongues of the various ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, mastering Cantonese is difficult for many minorities (Bhowmik and Kennedy, 2016). Although the Education Bureau has initiated supplemental Cantonese lessons for ethnic minority children and youth (Education Bureau, n. d. a), ethnic minorities continue to encounter difficulties in mastering Cantonese because of limited resources and opportunities to practice in their social environments (e.g., Fang 2019; Hue and Kennedy, 2014). Based on existing research on Hong Kong's ethnic minorities, insufficient Cantonese language proficiency represents a key barrier to social integration by making it difficult to access health services (Chui et al., 2020), driving poor academic performance (Bhowmik and Kennedy, 2016) and hindering employability (e.g., Chan et al., 2005), to name a few disadvantages. One way to improve social integration and provide rich data and recommendations to Hong Kong policymakers could be to examine possible systemic or institutional barriers hampering the social inclusion of ethnic minorities.

Existing statistical reports on ethnic minorities include thorough descriptions of sociodemographics (e.g., school attendance, age groups, Hong Kong residency status), yet information about how to ease reported barriers for ethnic minorities is lacking. In other words, the understanding of ethnic minorities is generally confined to sociodemographic information and fails to produce actionable strategies to enhance social integration between Chinese (i.e., local Hong Kong Chinese and Mainland Chinese) and non-Chinese (ethnic minorities) individuals in Hong Kong. To the best of our knowledge, existing empirically driven findings largely focus on low socio-economic status ethnic minority youth and highlight Cantonese language acquisition as the key to promoting social inclusion (Arat et al., 2016). Such studies mainly focus on ethnic minorities' experiences thereby providing an opportunity for further research that more fully examines existing policies for the social inclusion of ethnic minorities and that also projects how to successfully foster the social integration of ethnic minorities through new policies (Law and Lee, 2012). To promote a socially inclusive society, this study explores views of educators on how individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds are integrated/excluded in the context of Hong Kong. This study employs multiculturalism as the lens guiding the research questions and the interpretation of findings.

We chose a multicultural approach because multiculturalism is central to contemporary debates about cultural diversity and social inclusion in the West. According to the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Song 2020), multiculturalism is characterized by "the fact of diversity in a society, in the context of Western liberal democratic societies." This definition is generally used in the West, but there is scant literature (Kymlicka and He, 2006; Lin and Jackson, 2019) specifically covering East Asian settings.

In this paper, we first briefly introduce the understanding and development of multiculturalism in the West, followed by an introduction to multiculturalism in East Asia.

The scope of multiculturalism within this study only covers ethnic minorities and does not consider other types of minority groups (e.g., based on sexual orientation). Although the Hong Kong Census (2016) lists further groups under the ethnic minority designation, our study on ethnic minorities focuses on South Asians (i.e., Pakistanis, Indians, Nepalese) and Southeast Asians (i.e., Filipinos, Thais) mostly from low-income households and who have reported experiences of perceived discrimination in Hong Kong (e.g., Crabtree and Wong, 2013).

Multiculturalism in the West

Multiculturalism is rooted in the Western sphere. According to Will Kymlicka (2018), there have been four main waves of discourse on multiculturalism based on factors such as geopolitics, historical development, and culture. First, various cultures and ethnic groups (e.g., Georgians, Jews) co-existed during the Ottoman Empire (Kymlicka 2018). These groups likely co-resided peacefully to facilitate social harmony (e.g., meeting the basic needs of individuals or groups rather than considering their differences), which may not be the current version of multiculturalism given the absence of dimensions like social justice and equality. The next era covers the period prior to the Second World War, when the understanding of multiculturalism was more likely to be associated with the relations between master and slave or conqueror and conquered, as in Hong Kong's British colonial period (Kymlicka 2018). The third wave of multiculturalism was linked to issues of minority rights (e.g., Black rights in the United States) and was most prevalent between the 1970s and 1990s (Kymlicka 2018), but efforts to protect minority rights continue to the present day. Finally, since the mid-1990s, assimilation has become more common in relation to ideas of nation-building and citizenship. Other scholars such as Charles Taylor (1994) have linked multiculturalism with broader politics of recognition, raising questions about the ethnocentric proclivity of academic enquiry. Definitions of multiculturalism can also vary within a country. For instance, Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor (2008) have suggested that there are different perspectives on the conceptualization of multiculturalism in Canada. They stated that interculturalism (opposing the recognition of different groups' assertiveness in the public sphere; Bouchard 2011) is employed as an integration model that reflects ethno-cultural recognition. Another scholar James Banks (1993), for example, has worked on the dimensions of multicultural education in the United States, advocating for the incorporation of African American history into existing school curricula. Multiculturalism is also observed to be shaped by socio-political views. For instance, liberal multiculturalists are more likely to conceptualize multiculturalism as a respect for diversity in cultural groups via instrumental terms ("cultural groups are respected because doing so helps secure the liberal goal of individual autonomy," (Spinner-Halev 2008, p. 547)). In contrast, non-liberal multiculturalists tend to state that "cultures deserve respect because they are intrinsically valuable" (Spinner-Halev 2008, p. 547).

Some countries, such as Germany and France, have experienced social malaise with Muslim ethnic minorities, especially after the 9/11 terror attack in the United States by radical Islamic groups (Kymlicka 2018). Similar phenomena have been observed in Europe with the Islamophobia following the 2004 attacks in Madrid, the 2005 London attacks, and the 2011 Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris (Abdelkader 2017). Based on a systematic review of multiculturalism in the European Union conducted by Angeliki Mikelatou and Eugenia Arvanitis (2019), the failure of multiculturalism in European Union countries results from inadequately addressing significant differences in the values of liberal and non-liberal societies.

Ongoing debates have highlighted concerns about multiculturalism as an adopted social policy because immigrant group recognition or accommodation may over-emphasise the value of ethnic solidarity and undermine national solidarity and trust (Banting and Kymlicka, 2013). There is therefore no consensus on whether multiculturalism is the best social policy for the successful integration of ethnic heterogeneity and cultural diversity (Kymlicka 2018). Mason (2018) argues that multiculturalism has been criticized for discouraging social integration. He points out that minorities are expected to be integrated in a mainstream society aligned with existing social policy (e.g., while some ethnic groups tend to be accommodated, asylum seekers are less likely to be integrated).

Proponents of multiculturalism highlight the importance of catering to universal human needs (e.g., education, accommodation) and individual needs through specific and universal services and the promotion of justice (e.g., Kymlicka 1995; Modood 2013; Parekh 2006; Patten 2014). Scholars such as Bourke de Vries (2020) underline the possibility of triggering the social exclusion of sub-cultures within ethnic minority groups, such as hippies, because of the financial costs and burden on social welfare. On the other hand, scholars (e.g., Barry 2001) have also argued that multiculturalism is more likely to be linked to protecting cultural differences than to promoting common values, social unity, and solidarity (Levrau and Loobuyck, 2018). There are several current social movements addressing the rights of non-White minorities in the United States (a multicultural country perceived as a melting pot of diverse cultures), such as the Black Lives Matter movement, which has raised awareness regarding the excessive use of force in policing against Black individuals as well as the U.S. phenomenon of "Karens" (a term used for middle-aged White women using White privilege against non-White groups) or false accusations made often by White people against Black people. On the other hand, multiculturalism is not only limited to inclusion/exclusion of racial or ethnic groups, but also intersectional markers such as gender, sexual orientation (e.g., homophobia), and ability/disability. Intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), has been used to identify the interconnection of social categorizations such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, and disability which create overlapping layers of discrimination for individuals and groups. Susan Moller Okin (1998) further debates embracing cultural respect of a certain cultural group for those who have experienced social exclusion.

Apart from ethnic minorities, indigenous/aboriginal communities are also prominent within the context of multiculturalism, where White privilege is raised as a main concern linked to systematic barriers in access to education for indigenous communities in places like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (e.g., Dunn et al., 2010; Syed and Hill, 2011; Consedine and Consedine, 2005). Other scholars (Carens 2000; Gans 2003) have pointed to the question of whether refugees/asylum seekers should be entitled to the same rights as ethnic minorities (e.g., full or varying degrees of access to education, health services, etc.).

In sum, Western-based models of multiculturalism, which may be partially or completely different from Asian-based multiculturalism(s), aimed at promoting the social inclusion of ethnic minorities cannot be replicated in the Asian context. In the next section, we briefly outline the current debate on multiculturalism in East Asia.

Multiculturalism in East Asia

Scholarly debates in Asian contexts argue that Western-grounded multiculturalism may not be the best fit for non-Western settings due to different socio-cultural values and historical backgrounds (Kymlicka and He, 2006). Though the concept of multiculturalism as respect for ethno-cultural diversity rather than viewing diverse groups as problematic has become internationalised through global institutions such as the United Nations

(Kymlicka 2011), common understandings of multiculturalism and its implementation have been less streamlined. For example, in East Asian settings, an approach favouring social harmony (i.e., prioritising collectivism and promoting ethnic homogeneity) over social justice (i.e., prioritising individualism and promoting ethnic heterogeneity) is more likely to be considered for the social integration of ethnic minorities into mainstream society, in part due to myths of ethnic homogeneity tied to narratives of cultural nationalism (e.g., Korea and Japan (Cawley 2016; Narzary 2004)). In other places, such as in Malaysia, it is suggested that multiculturalism exists in "advancing the Bumiputeras (mostly Malays) social hegemony, [and] New Confucianism (a Chinese belief) [has] served as a catalyst for identity building in Singapore" (Kuah et al., 2021, p. 302). In Japan and Taiwan, scholars have pointed out that ethno-national identity is encouraged (Demelius 2020; Nagayosh 2011; Nesterova 2019). Along with East Asian societies' preference for an assimilationist approach towards ethnic minorities, there is also a simultaneous *othering* (Prieler 2010) phenomenon that relies on hierarchies of race-based acceptance (Kapai 2015) and marginalisation.

The notion of ethnic homogeneity and its impact on understandings of multiculturalism across East Asian contexts is challenged in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's history as a former British colony, coupled with its present special administrative region status, has lent to an ethno-geographic understanding of mainstream Hong Kong Chinese identity that is distinct from that of Chinese people from Mainland China—a schism from the projection of a cultural 'One China' (Chan 2017). Existing studies on multiculturalism in East Asia and in Hong Kong, in particular, can be found in the field of education and point out the limited understanding of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity in textbooks in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Jackson 2014). For example, Cong Lin and Liz Jackson's (2020) study on nationalism, local identity, and decolonisation in Hong Kong identify challenges to fostering cosmopolitan values, a balance of identities, and global citizenship within Hong Kong's educational curricula. A gap remains in conceptualising multiculturalism in non-Western contexts. Addressing this gap in understanding multiculturalism in a non-Western setting can benefit research and provide insights for policymakers on how to cultivate the social inclusion of diverse ethnic populations in East Asian settings such as Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Context

The Hong Kong government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been endeavouring since 1997 (Wong and Baig, 2019) to enhance the social integration of ethnic minorities in the spheres of education by providing parent education programmes helping ethnic minority parents to support their children's learning (e.g., Dhar 2018; Education Bureau n. d. b; Hong Kong Unison 2018) and in employment by offering recruitment opportunities in diverse public sectors (e.g., the police force; Census and Statistics Department 2018; Equal Opportunities Commission 2019). In contrast to Hong Kong's self-image as an international city, Hong Kong's social inclusion policy regarding non-Chinese individuals and groups is ambiguous. More wide-reaching social policy initiatives for integration have yet to be identified as Hong Kong lacks a formal multiculturalism policy (Nagy 2014).

Hong Kong is in flux with relation to multiculturalism in practice because it is divided among 1) a deeper incorporation into the nation state (e.g., 2012 Guide of Moral and National Education (Wong et al., 2020)); 2) the rise of localism (i.e. a differentiation of Hong Kong Chinese identity from mainland Chinese identity) (Kaeding 2017; Veg 2017); and 3) its branding as "Asia's World City" (Brand Hong Kong Management Unit 2017). Furthermore, Hong Kong does not have a clear social policy for incorporating other

ethnically Chinese individuals (namely Mainland Chinese, also referred to as "new arrivals") and ethnic minorities (non-Chinese) in the existing version of the city's Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) (Loper 2001). For instance, an eleven-year-old Indian child sought help from a policeman in Hong Kong and was wrongfully arrested. The child could only speak English. Based on a Hong Kong Unison (an NGO) interview published in the *Hong Kong Free Press* (2020), the child's case was not considered racial discrimination as the police actions are not covered as a service under the RDO.

A handful of reports (e.g., Legislative Council 2010) and scholarly work (e.g., Sautman 2005) have pointed out that the RDO fails to protect ethnic minorities' rights and freedoms in relation to religion and/or linguistic diversity. This shortcoming in the RDO has been lamented by social workers and other stakeholders who work closely with ethnic minorities (e.g., Petersen 2007). Furthermore, a study conducted by Carol Wing Sze Chan and colleagues (2015) also argued that RDO is vague in terms of acknowledgment across diverse ethnic groups. They found that South and Southeast Asian ethnic minorities are reported to know less about the RDO compared to their Chinese counterparts. This finding may imply that the RDO is not clearly explained or conveyed to ethnic minority groups.

Social policy scholars working in the Hong Kong context echo similar criticisms. Some scholars have called for more of an interventionist social policy to "build strong, creative, and sustainable ethnic cultural communities in Hong Kong" (Erni and Leung 2014, p. 222) and acknowledge the benefits of cultural plurality in the territory, with Cantonese language acquisition listed as one amongst many key components (e.g. Anti-racist curricula, inter-cultural competence training for educators, etc.) for social inclusion in their "Critical Multicultural Action Proposal for Hong Kong." Other scholar such as C. M. A. Cheung and H. Y. E. Chou (2018) lean towards assimilation policies—using Chinese values and emphasizing Cantonese language acquisition—as a way to enhance ethnic minorities' socio-economic status and reach social harmony with Hong Kong's Chinese ethno-cultural majority population. Benevolent multiculturalism whereby "cultural identity is recognized subject to the changes of social or economic conditions, and existing laws are limited to offering protection" (Arat and Kerelian, 2019 p. 320) has been another possible social policy avenue for Hong Kong. To determine the best approach, there is a critical need to examine the understanding of multiculturalism in Hong Kong, as it is a complex and multifaceted concept with the capacity to impact an array of societal characteristics, such as "modes of dress, language policy, race relations, religious freedom, education policy, court procedures, and immigration" (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2019, p. 2).

Given that a social inclusion policy for ethnic minorities and co-ethnics can promote better social integration in Hong Kong, we aim to analyse the conceptualisation of Hong Kong-based multiculturalism to fill the gap in existing literature regarding multicultural-ism in East Asia. This research can yield preliminary recommendations for key stake-holders such as policymakers in relation to facilitating social inclusion in Hong Kong society.

Methodology

This small-scale study uses a qualitative research design to obtain in-depth and rich data to expand upon the known applications of multiculturalism and how multiculturalism is defined in the Hong Kong context. We specifically chose teachers as our participants because they are valued as important stakeholders in Hong Kong society and have first-hand experience with ethnic minority and co-ethnic children and youth. They can also provide detailed descriptions of multiculturalism in Hong Kong to inform key approaches for policymakers. Participant inclusion criteria include the following points: 1) either a

Chinese (local Hong Kong Chinese and co-ethnic mainland) or a non-Chinese background; 2) Hong Kong resident or eligible for Hong Kong residency; 3) aged eighteen to sixty years; 4) born either in Hong Kong, mainland China, or overseas; 5) competent in Cantonese, Mandarin, or English; 6) trained in education (e.g., tutors, teachers) and actively working in the field regardless of the number of years of experience; and 7) experience teaching ethnic minorities. In total, twenty interviews were conducted with teachers (one pair interview and nineteen individual interviews). Table 1 presents participants' sociodemographic information. The ethnic composition of participants included five mainland Chinese, seven Hong Kong Chinese, four Pakistani, one Filipino-Japanese, two Filipinos, and one Indian. Regarding gender composition, there were seven males and thirteen females. Four participants held postgraduate degrees while the rest held bachelor's degrees. Participants' ages ranged between twenty-one and thirty-nine years.

In the interview guide, our questions consisted of understanding teachers' own definition(s) of multiculturalism and how these might be different from or similar to multiculturalism in Western settings. Our questions included the following: "How would you describe multiculturalism in general?", "Does multiculturalism differ from one setting to another? In the West? In the East?", "How would you define multiculturalism in the Hong Kong context?", and "What kind of factors do you consider when defining multiculturalism?" When necessary, probes such as "Could you tell me more about…?" were used to fully understand the participant's comments. Following the interviews, the participants were debriefed and offered the chance to ask questions.

Procedure and Data Collection

Utilising snowball sampling, an extensive network of Chinese and non-Chinese stakeholders were recruited as the sample population for this study using the inclusion criteria. To have a deeper understanding of Hong Kong-based multiculturalism among teachers with different ethnic backgrounds, we divided the eligible participants' years of teaching into two different sub-groups. The first group consisted of ten participants who had taught ethnic minorities for a short period of time (less than a year), while the second group included twelve participants who had taught ethnic minorities for a longer period of time (at least three years). The rationale for this criterion relates to how one's level of experience with ethnic minorities may alter their perception of multiculturalism in the context of Hong Kong.

Two part-time undergraduate students—one mainland Chinese student and one Hong Kong Chinese student—served as research assistants and were trained by the first author of this project on ethics, the data collection procedure, and participant recruitment. Both students can communicate in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Interviews were conducted in the language preferred by each participant: nine interviews were held in Cantonese (widely spoken by Hong Kong Chinese), five in Mandarin (widely spoken by mainland Chinese), and six in English. Each interview lasted for approximately sixty to ninety minutes. If necessary, after each interview, the research assistants had a briefing session with the first author to discuss their observations and to provide updates about the preliminary findings. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from Lingnan University, Office of Research and Knowledge Transfer (EC031/1920). Participants were also debriefed before data collection, and consent forms were collected. Participants' names were removed and renamed as P1-P20 to ensure confidentiality.

Participants were recruited between mid-June 2020 and mid-August 2020. To recruit participants, the authors used Facebook and accessed research participants through teacher networks via a collaborating centre, which provides innovative solutions to the longstanding, challenging social problem of education for underprivileged and marginalised ethnic

Table 1. Sociodemographic information of participants

Number	Pseudonym Name	Age	Gender	Birth place	Preferred Language for Interview	Ethnicity	Educational background	Working in school or tutorial centre	Working period in school/centre	Overseas working experience
1	P1	21	Male	Mainland China	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
2	P2	22	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
3	P3	20	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	Pakistani	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
4	P6	21	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
5	P7	23	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
6	P8	30	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
7	P9	24	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
8	P10	23	Female	Hong Kong	Cantonese	(Hong Kong) Chinese	Bachelor	Tutorial centre	<12 months	No
9	P11	24	Female	India	English	Indian	Bachelor	School	1 year and a half	No
10	P12	29	Male	The Philippines	English	Filipino-Japanese	Bachelor	School	3 years	Yes
11	P13	24	Female	Hong Kong	English	Pakistani	Bachelor	School	1 year	No

(*Continued*)

Table 1 *Continued*

Number	Pseudonym Name	Age	Gender	Birth place	Preferred Language for Interview	Ethnicity	Educational background	Working in school or tutorial centre	Working period in school/centre	Overseas working experience
12	P14	39	Male	The Philippines	English	Filipino	Postgraduate	School	2 years	No
13	P15	26	Male	Mainland China	Mandarin	(Mainland) Chinese	Postgraduate	School	1 year	No
14	P16	37	Female	Hong Kong	English	Pakistani	Bachelor	School	4 years	No
15	P17	33	Male	The Philippines	English	Filipino	Postgraduate	School	9 years	Yes
16	P18	31	Female	Pakistan	Cantonese	Pakistani	Bachelor	School	10 years	No
17	P19	24	Female	Mainland China	Mandarin	(Mainland) Chinese	Bachelor	School	1 year	No
18	P20	24	Male	Mainland China	Mandarin	(Mainland) Chinese	Bachelor	School	1 year	No
19	P21	26	Male	Mainland China	Mandarin	(Mainland) Chinese	Postgraduate	School	2 years	No
20	P22	24	Female	Mainland China	Mandarin	(Mainland) Chinese	Bachelor	School	1 year	Yes

minority children in Hong Kong. The collaborating centre has offered critically important after-school academic support to empower ethnic minority children with essential educational life skills to integrate into mainstream Hong Kong society.

Selected participants also referred other eligible participants to the research assistants. In total, there were twenty interviews. Among these, ten interviews were conducted in the aforementioned centres with educators who worked closely with ethnic minority students. Eight participants worked in a tutorial centre, while twelve worked in a school. The remaining interviews were conducted via the Zoom video conferencing platform with educators who worked in public schools with ethnic minorities. We adopted a flexible data collection procedure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which became especially dire in mid-July 2020 in Hong Kong. Prior to the Zoom interviews, both research assistants were trained by the first author on data collection using online platforms.

The interview protocol consisted of a brief explanation of the study (e.g., aims, possible contributions, confidentiality); consent forms; a brief socioeconomic information sheet (e.g., age, gender, place of birth, number of years working with ethnic minorities); and interview questions covering participants' own definitions of multiculturalism, how they view multiculturalism in West and East Asia, their experiences of working with ethnic minorities and how they understand Hong-Kong-based multiculturalism.

Data Analysis

The research assistants transcribed the interviews verbatim. Given that both research assistants are proficient in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, for interviews conducted in Cantonese or Mandarin, one research assistant transcribed verbatim in English and the other research assistant transcribed the verbatim in English backwards and cross-checked to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed interviews. All proper names, places, or materials that may identify participants were removed from the transcripts. In team meetings, research assistants shared their observations about interviews, including their field notes. Notes were compared and discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was reached.

The data was analysed following the thematic analysis principle, or by identifying the frequency with which keywords emerged in the interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying a group of descriptive themes to develop new concepts or explanations for existing concepts (Thomas and Harden, 2008). The keywords are then analysed to determine patterns of commonalities and differences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). If discrepancies emerged regarding patterns, consensus was achieved via discussion amongst the research team. For example, one participant's statement on accepting others was coded under the sub-theme *mutual understanding and acceptance*. However, based on the research team's discussion, it was recoded under the sub-theme *social justice and social harmony* because the statement described social harmony and social justice as defining the participant's general understanding of multiculturalism.

Finally, the identified keywords were clustered into various sub-themes and main themes and manually cross-checked by the research team to ensure the accuracy of the data. Three key topics emerged: 1) the definition of multiculturalism, 2) multiculturalism in Hong Kong, and 3) comparison of the West with Hong Kong in relation to multiculturalism.

At the end of the data analysis, we identified three themes: 1) the general understanding of multiculturalism, which includes the sub-themes of a) diversified cultural/ethnic backgrounds, b) mutual understanding and acceptance, and c) inclusive social harmony and social justice; 2) perceived Hong-Kong-based multiculturalism, which includes the sub-theme of the perceived hierarchy of ethnic groups in Hong Kong; and 3) the main

differences between Western and Hong-Kong-based multiculturalism, which includes the sub-themes a) more acceptance of diversity in the West compared to Hong Kong and b) geographic location.

Findings

Emergent themes are shown in Table 2 and described below.

Table 2. Three themes

1. General Understanding of Multiculturalism (Number of participants' quotes) Keywords (number) Participants	2. Perceived Hong Kong-Based Multiculturalism (Number of participants' quotes) Keywords (number) Participants	3. Main Differences between Western- and Hong Kong-Based Multiculturalism (Number of participants' quotes) Keywords (numbers) Participants
1a. Diversified cultural/ethnic backgrounds (n=18) Keywords: cultural diversity (n=9), ethnic diversity (n=8), Participants: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P19, P20	2a. Perceived hierarchy of ethnic groups in Hong Kong society (n=6) Keywords: invisible segments (n=1), surface level multiculturalism (n=1), division of ethnic groups (n=2), societal segmentation (n=2) Participants: P7, P8, P9, P17, P20, P21	3a. More acceptance of diversity in the West compared to Hong Kong (n=11) Keywords: open to different cultures in West (n=7), acceptance of diverse cultures (n=4) Participants: P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, P11, P12, P13, P16, P17, P20
1b. Mutual understanding and acceptance (n=17) Keywords: acceptance (n=6), respect (n=6), mutual understanding (n=3), mutual learning (n=1), equal rights (n=1) Participants: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P17, P18, P20		3b. Geographic location (n=16) Keywords: regional issue (n=9), neighbouring countries (n=7) Participants: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18
1c. Inclusive social harmony and social justice (n=9) Keywords: social justice (n=4), social harmony (n=3), tolerance (n=2) Participants=P1, P2, P4, P7, P11, P14, P15, P17, P22		

The General Understanding of Multiculturalism

Three sub-themes emerged under this theme: a) diversified cultural/ethnic backgrounds, b) mutual understanding and acceptance, and c) inclusive social justice and social harmony.

Diversified Cultural/Ethnic Backgrounds

Most participants linked multiculturalism to people from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds. For example:

> "It may refer to people from different cultural backgrounds living in the same place. There are different languages and cultures…" (P9).

> "Multiculturalism is…people from different ethnic backgrounds…" (P11).

> "I think multiculturalism is actually…everyone is included…cultural diversity…" (P16).

Mutual Understanding and Acceptance

Apart from the association between diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and multiculturalism, most participants stressed the importance of mutual understanding and acceptance of diverse ethnicities. For example, one participant stated:

> "I think the key is that many [people] with different cultural background[s] could live in [the] same environment. They should also embrace and accept each other…" (P20).

Another participant underlined the importance of reciprocal respect as well as anti-discrimination regardless of differences in age, skin colour, or socio-economic background:

> "Multiculturalism is like a place where many people from different cultural backgrounds live together, no matter where they are from and what colour they belong to, or whether you are rich or poor…giving respect and getting respect [back]" (P18).

One participant (P17) described their understanding of multiculturalism as promoting "empathy, mutual understanding and mutual learning among people of different cultural beliefs and traditions." Similarly, P13 added that multiculturalism means "equal rights, or that every single person in that community is free to live their lives the way that they want."

Inclusive Social Justice and Social Harmony
In this study, several participants referred to social harmony and social justice as ways to define multiculturalism in general. In most East Asian settings, which tend to be collectivist societies that meet the needs of minorities mostly based on the majority groups' needs or concerns, social harmony is more likely to be defined as a component of multiculturalism (e.g., Ip 2013; Kumar and Maehr, 2007). In contrast, social justice is perceived to be linked to Western contexts, which include more individualistic societies that meet the needs of minorities and majorities equally (e.g., Hugman 2010; Noble 2004). One participant shared,

> "Social justice and human dignity are very important components for the definition of multiculturalism because…multiculturalism…help[s] people gain a greater awareness

that…there are…populations that…are vulnerable to inequities in society…so, in order to have a genuinely multicultural mindset, it's important to be aware of that and with that awareness comes social action" (P17).

Another participant highlighted the importance of tolerance after describing the value of social justice, social harmony, and being open to multiculturalism:

"Actually, I think sometimes it depends on the level of education of the people in that country—that is, the degree of acceptance of different cultures. If they [people] are more tolerant, they will tend to be more open, and so they may try to understand and accept different cultures" (P2).

Similarly, P22 also stressed the importance of tolerance and embracing different ethnicities, which could pave the way for the promotion of multiculturalism as "… people of different races can embrace each other in a region or a country with tolerance and live together."

Perceived Hong Kong-based Multiculturalism

This section describes how participants identified Hong Kong-based multiculturalism. Perceived Hong Kong-based multiculturalism was revealed to emerge as (in)visible segments in Hong Kong society.

Perceived Hierarchy of Ethnic Groups
One participant stated that:

"Hong Kong people are very self-protective in the sense that they are exclusive (排外) … they reject the new immigrants (新移民)" (P8).

P9 echoed this view and argued that people in Hong Kong are "self-protective against everyone but White people," while P17 defined multiculturalism in Hong Kong as "surface level." P20 explained the perceived hierarchy of ethnicity:

"We can even divide it [perceptions of ethnic groups] into several levels like the caste system in India. Usually, White people will be on top…sometimes White people will even outpace the local residents. The local people are on the second level, then the lower level would be people from mainland China. The next level is migrants from South East Asia or South Asia" (P20).

Another participant was concerned with the socioeconomic status of ethnic minorities, particularly for mainland Chinese people:

"When they first arrive in Hong Kong…they don't have a strong economic background…causing the local[s] to stereotype them. Even after a few generations, some of their descendants are able to integrate into society or contribute to [Hong Kong] society…[but the] public (local people) still regards them as immigrants" (P21).

 P7 noted that due to societal segmentation, a surface level multiculturalism seems to be observed by the participants as follows:

> "…[a] segment of the population to gain a greater understanding and particularly…for another segment of the population…and without these opportunities, the level of multiculturalism might not go beyond the surface level" (P7).

The Main Differences Between Western and Hong Kong-based Multiculturalism

More Acceptance of Diversity in the West Compared to Hong Kong

In this study, many participants shared the view that the West tends to be more open to accepting different ethnic groups compared to Hong Kong. One participant explained:

> "For example, in Australia, people are more open, more enthusiastic, simpler, and they are more open to different cultures. Say a bus driver, he would greet all the passengers, so he would also greet us, people from different countries, cultures, ethnicities. But in Hong Kong, interpersonal relationships in the East are more reserved, even a bit ruthless, so you rarely see drivers greet you in taxis or even on buses in Hong Kong. Since [the driver] doesn't even greet the locals, he wouldn't have a better attitude toward different ethnicities and outsiders. So, I think this is a fundamental…difference in culture…between the East and the West" (P20).

 Another participant echoed that there is a difference between the way ethnic minorities are perceived between Western and Asian settings:

> "I think in [the] West, it's [acceptance of diverse cultures] more common. People are more generous towards people from different cultural backgrounds" (P3).

 Additionally, one participant reported that there seems to be a dominant culture or a cultural hierarchy based on the values of the ethno-cultural majority in Hong Kong. On the other hand, in the West, different cultures tend to merge regardless of the dominance of the receiving country's values or culture:

> "In Western countries, there are also a lot of different kinds of people, like Indians and Pakistanis. They [ethnic majority] don't mind, and they [ethnic minority] display their own cultural values and integrate their routines…in the East, maybe [locals] are stricter and they value their own [ethnic majority] culture more than other minority cultures" (P4).

Geographic Location

Most participants suggested that geographic location may shape a nation's definition of multiculturalism.

> "In the case of East [Asian] countries, if we take Hong Kong as an example, [Hong Kong] may discriminate…against South Asian people, or maybe even discriminate against people from mainland [China]…but maybe…the United States…might reject some people from Mexico…it depends on the scope or the regional issue" (P6).

Another participant shared a similar view, adding:

> "It may be different depending on geographic location and culture. For example, in China, China's cultures converge with the cultures of Japan, Korea, and South Asians. These are the neighbouring countries, just like in Western countries… Such diverse cultures are influenced by geographical location… It [the West] is a setting…more multi-ethnic" (P1).

Another participant commented on the relevance of geographical location, where neighbouring settings impact one another, shaping people's understanding of multiculturalism:

> "Multiculturalism seems to be more about accepting the people in one's own homeland. That is to say, for example, Singaporeans are more accepting of Singaporeans or Malaysians or people in Southeast Asia, but their acceptance is not so high for the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans…" (P15).

Discussion

This study explores the views of important stakeholders, namely educators, regarding multiculturalism vis-à-vis ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. We interviewed twenty teachers working in Hong Kong public school settings or tutorial centres. Based on our findings, regardless of the participants' diverse ethnic backgrounds (Hong Kong Chinese, mainland Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Filipino-Japanese), important recurrent themes emerged. In contrast to Western multiculturalism where religion has been observed to be important (e.g., Islamophobia), this study highlights the key themes of geographic location, perceived hierarchy of ethnic groups, and inclusive social harmony and social justice in defining Hong Kong-based multiculturalism. In the following discussion, we examine these key themes.

Geographic Location

Geographic location is a key theme in participants' understanding of multiculturalism in Hong Kong and comparable Asian settings. There is a notion that there are ethnicities which intrinsically belong to a specific geographic area and those who are 'outsiders' despite their duration of residency (first, second, or third generation) or legal status (permanent residency) in Hong Kong. Participants' in-group and out-group perceptions of multiculturalism in Hong Kong tie into Henri Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory (determination of one's social behaviour by themselves and their perceived identity by the group members), infusing it with a territorial component wherein the social categorisation and inclusion or exclusion of people becomes strongly linked to whether they are deemed to belong to the physical territory of Hong Kong.

The emphasis on the ethnic majority's (i.e., Hong Kong Chinese) cultural dominance and exclusivity (i.e., barriers to entry to this in-group) underscores the rise of localism in Hong Kong, which can be viewed as a reaction to the increased political and cultural integration efforts of P.R. China asserting control over the territory (e.g., 2012 Guide of Moral and National Education (Wong et al., 2020); National Security Law). The ripple effect of such macro-policies may impact the ways in which co-ethnics and ethnic minorities are positioned within the social hierarchy in Hong Kong. As expressed by P15, the notion of homeland is complex for the territory of Hong Kong because it belongs to the broader entity of P.R. China. Indeed, there is currently a movement for a cultural

bifurcation from China due to the heated political post-reunification climate. Although Hong Kong has received diverse groups of people since the British colonial period, the majority of the population remains ethnic Chinese. There is a strong perception that Hong Kong Chinese people fulfil the criterion of geographic belonging. The perception (e.g., P1) that Western nations are traditional recipients of migrants and therefore feature greater cultural diversity is differentiated with conceptions of multiculturalism in the Asian context, with Hong Kong implied to be less 'multi-ethnic' in comparison. This schism between the "Asia's World City" branding campaign by the Hong Kong Government and the regional and national views of acceptance and inclusion expressed by participants raises questions about the lack of social policy to bridge the cultural segmentation of Hong Kong society. Similarly, Jackson (2018) found that ethnic minorities are invisible in representations of Hong Kong diversity in liberal arts textbooks; this suggests that education plays an important role in shaping understandings of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Hong Kong.

Perceived Hierarchy of Ethnic Groups

The perceived hierarchy of ethnic groups, which is linked to understanding(s) of multiculturalism in Hong Kong, is salient within this study. Participants felt that different ethnic minorities (e.g., Indians and Pakistanis) may gain more acceptance in Western contexts compared to Hong Kong due to the perceived prevalence of diversity in the West. Given this perception, participants implied that there may be more openness to difference abroad compared to Hong Kong, where the dominant ethno-cultural group is viewed as the 'most' accepted in the hierarchy of ethnic groups. This sentiment is echoed in a study conducted by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (2009), titled Thematic Household Survey Report: 39 on Racial Acceptance in Hong Kong, in which Chinese, White, Japanese, and Korean people were rated according to racial acceptance for various aspects of social life (e.g., having an employer of X ethnic group; having a Y ethnic group member as a family relative). This survey was published twelve years ago and has yet to be updated to understand any potential improvements on racial acceptance in the territory.

Participants further compared the ethnic hierarchy in Hong Kong with the caste system in India (P20). This comparison can appear as ethno-cultural hubris (ethnocultural positioning for an identity), an impediment to multiculturalism. However, the macro-view reveals increasing pro-integration views regarding Chinese laws and policies which may impact Hong Kong's ethno-cultural majority and levels of acceptance (e.g., concerns of 'mainlandisation' in terms of their self-protection leading to a more exclusive/perceived xenophobic (排外,P8) environment as cultural preservation, particularly in the case of co-ethnic 'new immigrants'). Participants' responses reflect a 'selective' multiculturalism (Kerelian et al., 2017) whereby levels of acceptance depend upon an ethnic as well as a geographic hierarchy. The understanding of multiculturalism also appears to be related to levels of acceptance of ethnic diversity in Hong Kong. However, even for those ethnic groups which are presented as highly accepted, the ways in which these groups are socially included or integrated was absent from the participants' accounts in relation to the application of multiculturalism in Hong Kong. Participants' *general* understanding of the concept of multiculturalism appears to be at odds with their understanding of *Hong Kong-based* multiculturalism, with the former denoting openness, tolerance, and coexistence and the latter exclusion, protectionism, and ethnic hierarchy—that is, a "living together, but separately" phenomenon (Kerelian and Jordan, 2019).

Inclusive Social Harmony and Social Justice

In our past research (Arat and Kerelian, 2019), we proposed a conceptual framework for the promotion of Hong Kong-based multiculturalism, highlighting that social justice could function as a component of social harmony. In contrast to our framework reframing multiculturalism by combining social justice and social harmony, existing literature largely supports the idea of social harmony and social justice as opposing concepts. Based on a number of scholars' definitions (e.g., Ip 2013), social harmony mostly focuses on collectivism and emphasises the majority groups' needs and concerns. Conversely, social justice is linked to individualistic societies where individual needs and minority groups' concerns are stressed (e.g., Hugman 2010). The findings of the present study support our previously proposed framework and add empirical evidence regarding social harmony, social justice, and multiculturalism in the Hong Kong context. This study makes it evident that both social justice (to promote the social inclusion of minority groups) and social harmony (to integrate different ethnic groups and promote social cohesion) go hand in hand. For example, participants observed that social justice and social harmony are essential components for defining a general understanding of multiculturalism (e.g., P17). One participant (P2) added that tolerance (a prominent component of social harmony) opens the door to being more understanding and open to diverse cultures, thereby promoting social inclusion.

Conclusion

We can clearly observe that having experiences in an East Asian setting modifies and enriches the classical definition of Western-based multiculturalism, where social justice is more nuanced. Further research could elaborate on the possible impacts of social justice and social harmony in shaping multiculturalism not only in East Asia but also in Western settings that host ethnic minorities from diverse East Asian backgrounds.

Policymakers should develop a concrete social policy to establish a socially inclusive society in Hong Kong. Currently, ethnic minorities include all types of migrants (short-term, long-term, or eligible for right of abode). However, foreign domestic workers (also referred to as domestic helpers) are not entirely considered ethnic minorities because they do not necessarily have the right of abode in Hong Kong given their employment status. The disjuncture in immigration policy for right of abode (generally granted to a person continuously residing in Hong Kong for at least seven years) creates additional layers of consideration for social inclusion (e.g., foreign domestic workers cannot obtain right of abode) in Hong Kong. By amending the existing RDO coverage (regarding the circumstances or criteria for discrimination experienced by refugees/asylum seekers that could be partially or completely different from other ethnic minority groups' rights) in collaboration with relevant stakeholders from NGOs, education settings, Education Bureau (EDB), and the like, social policy can be shaped more holistically.

There are a number of limitations to note regarding this study. First, this study only included Asian ethnic minority groups. There are other non-Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Further studies should be conducted to consider perceptions of diverse non-Asian ethnic groups, particularly because existing research suggests that there is a perception of White privilege in Hong Kong (Kerelian and Jordan, 2019). Next, further empirical efforts could focus on different stakeholders' (e.g., ethnic community leaders, government officials, social service providers) views of multiculturalism in Hong Kong to work towards a common ground for multiculturalism rather than focusing solely on differences or challenges of multiculturalism. Future research could also explore the differences and similarities between who believes in what type of multiculturalism in relation to ethnic

background, years of work, or other characteristics. However, based on our observations, teachers with overseas experience tended to provide rich comparisons between the West and East. Additionally, a quantitative research design could offer a more general understanding or capture a bigger picture; our small-scale study provides a limited view of ethnic minorities' acculturation strategies.

The current study only recruited teachers as participants. As such, the findings and implications of this study are generated from educators' perspectives. Recruiting diverse stakeholders (e.g., community leaders, social service providers) for a larger study could reveal nuances or shared perceptions about Hong Kong-based multiculturalism that merit further examination. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical effort to collect perspectives on Hong Kong-based multiculturalism and how multiculturalism in Hong Kong differs from Western understandings. We hope that this study will provide important implications and inspiration for future researchers and policymakers to cultivate a socially inclusive Hong Kong society as well as insights for broader East Asian settings.

Acknowledgement

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