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Assessing the Situation of Nepalese Community in Hong Kong

AIS 6002 Thesis
MSocSc in Development Studies

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OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC PAPERS BY STUDENTS (OAS)

Abstract

This research project aims to analyze the challenges faced by Nepalese living in Hong Kong. This paper will critically analyze the marginalization of Nepalese in education and employment sector that has perpetuated the cycle of poverty among Nepalese community. The paper will further analyze the social integration policy and programs implemented by the Hong Kong SAR government to evaluate the communication gap between the government and the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. The paper will further investigate the significance of the culture of caste system in the Nepalese community in terms of group dynamics and access to resources.



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OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC PAPERS BY STUDENTS (OAPS)

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Hong Kong proudly considers itself as a multicultural society. Often promoted as “Asia’s World City”, Hong Kong is portrayed as culturally rich, multicultural and pluralistic community (Law & Lee, 2012). According to Vani and John (2009) multicultural societies acknowledges, tolerates issues raised by globalization, immigration and increasing ethnic minorities within their community while respecting individual belief and development. Rex and Singh (2003) views multicultural society as a “natural addition to liberal democracy and the democratic values of tolerance and respect for diversity”. Furthermore, a multicultural society promotes integration for pluralistic society that allows for various minority cultures to coexist with the majority culture (Borooah & Mangan, 2009). A multicultural society doesn’t necessarily promote assimilation which entails the fusion of minority groups into the main society. According to Bohra- Mishra (2011) assimilation occurs in a diverse society, in which people of different ethnic and culture develop into a common culture, allowing them to sustain a common national experience.

Hong Kong does have a diverse culture and is home to various ethnic minorities. Commonly considered as a group of people who share a belief in solidarity based on common physical feature and culture or because of their shared experience of migration or colonization, ethnic minorities in Hong Kong include personage of Non-Chinese ethnicity (Guibernau & Rex, 2010). The 2011 Hong Kong Population Census report indicated that ethnic minorities referring to mainly Whites, Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Nepalese, Pakistanis and others represented 6.4% of the 7,071,576 total populations in Hong Kong. There were 451,183 ethnic minorities living in Hong Kong in 2011 out of which 18,042 Indians, 16,518 Pakistanis

and 12,580 Nepalese were residing in Hong Kong respectively (Census and Statistical Department, 2012).

Among the ethnic minorities, Nepalese population in Hong Kong is distinct as their migration history is more recent than the other South Asian population such as Indian and Pakistani who are well established in Hong Kong. According to Frost (2004), majority of Indian and Pakistani community members “are fluent Cantonese speakers, and from which are drawn some of the wealthiest families in Hong Kong such as the Harilela brothers who control a multi-billion dollar global empire”. Integration for Nepalese community in Hong Kong has been challenging for the Nepalese members.

Nepalese in Hong Kong are subjected to unfairness and injustice in both private and public sectors including education, employment, immigration policy, social services and political representation. Even though second and third generations of Nepalese in Hong Kong have already established themselves, however, they are still not fully integrated into the Hong Kong society. Factors such as language barrier and negative stereotype associated with being South Asian have hampered their educational and employment prospect (Crabtree & Wong, 2010). Sara and Wong (2012) states that “despite the reputation of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) as a vibrant, international centre of commerce and enterprise, the dominant Chinese culture largely ignores the position of resident, ethnic minorities groups by attempting to maintain an ethnically homogenized monoculture”. The marginalized position in regards to job-seeking and education has perpetuated a cycle of poverty among ethnic minority and hindered their prospects of better life in Hong Kong (Collins, 1998).

1.2 Research Objective

The main aim of the research project is to analyze the challenges faced by Nepalese living in Hong Kong. The research aims to better understand the various aspects and the dynamics of the Nepalese community in Hong Kong. It will assess the underprivileged situation of the Nepalese in education and in employment and identify key factors obstructing the integration of the Nepalese community into Hong Kong society. It will evaluate the effectiveness of the government's integration policy and programs. It also seeks to examine the roles of the ethnic organizations within the community and how caste division has left its effects on the integration of the Nepalese.

1.3 Research Question

To obtain a better understanding of the Nepalese in Hong Kong, the research project will find answers to the following questions:

- What are the main challenges and difficulties that Nepalese face in their everyday life in Hong Kong?
- What are the main factors obstructing Nepalese integration in Hong Kong?
- What kind of support Nepalese may obtain from within their own community and from the society at large?
- How effective are the official integration policy and programs and what improvements can be made to such policy?

1.4 Significance of the Research

The research aims to uncover various challenges faced by Nepalese population in their integration in Hong Kong. Although there has been some literature on ethnic minorities and their integration in Hong Kong, there is a lack of comprehensive literature on the dynamics of the Nepalese communities in Hong Kong. With more in-depth investigation of the situations of the Nepalese, this research serves to deepen the understanding of a minority group in Hong Kong. It will also discuss the caste system effects on the life of Nepalese, which is rarely brought to light in other related studies. The research will also bring important messages to policy makers in relation to minority policies in Hong Kong, and will lead to improvement and positive changes for the Nepalese community.

1.5 Research Methodology

The research project employed qualitative methods to gain in-depth understanding of the Nepalese community dynamics in Hong Kong. Firstly, random survey was conducted in Yau Tsim Mong, Yuen Long and Tsuen Wan which had the highest concentration of Nepalese residing in Hong Kong. In-depth interviews and consultation was conducted with the academics, community leaders, students and members of community to assess the situation of Nepalese in Hong Kong.

- **Questionnaires/ Surveys**

The first part of the questionnaire included income distribution, survey of occupation, education level and language proficiency to map personnel profile of the interviewees. The second part of the questionnaire consists of questions regarding difficulties they have encountered in adapting to life in Hong Kong and accessing various services provided by government and any other service providers. The survey also includes questions regarding

their identity, community kinship and social support in Hong Kong. A total of 105 surveys were conducted during the month of April to June in 2013.

- **In- depth interviews/ Consultation**

The research project conducted in depth interviews and consultation with academics, community leaders, government officials to better assess the circumstances of ethnic minorities. Community leaders, parents and students are interviewed to acquire comprehensive insider perspectives of the difficulty and challenges of Nepalese community. The interviews were also significant in reviewing the needs and requirement of Nepalese community members in Hong Kong.



CHAPTER 2 Literature review

2.1 Defining Ethnicity

Milton Gordon (1964) defines ethnicity as a sense of community that is created through commonality of race, religion, nationality and history. Similarly, Hutnik (1991) defines ethnic groups as “a group of people with a common sense of identity and cultural traditions that are different than other members in the society”. Shibutani and Kwan (1965) expanded the concept of ethnicity as a group not only identifying themselves based on commonality but also identified by others as a group. In the ever changing world, the concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity has also changed to embrace modern definition of ethnic identity as individuals defining themselves based on affiliation to a certain group or groups resulting in a person having multiple identities (Hutnik, 1991, p. 19). Wallman (1983) states that “ethnic identity is not fixed but rather only one of many identity options for an individuals.

Phinney (1991) describes specific components such as self-identification as group members with similar attitudes, ethnic practices and behaviours and knowledge of one's group defines individual's ethnic identity. Similarly, all ethnic groups are not minority groups but are specified based on the position held by the ethnic group. Hutnik (1991, p.21) suggested that minority groups share commonality not only of race, religion, nationality but also of shared experiences of discrimination and disadvantages. He further emphasizes that minority are prevented from resources based on the fact that they differ from the majority group that can create an attitudes of prejudice against minority people (Hutnik, 1991, p. 21). Barth (1969, pg. 10) defines ethnic group as a group of people who share same cultural values,

have communication and interactive mechanism and has common identity that differs themselves from other groups. However, having common identity based on shared values that are different than other groups can create negativity such stereotyping of a person or a group and also promote social, political and economic exclusion of such groups based on their differences (Eriksen, 2002. Pg, 23)

2.2 Ethnicity for Immigrant Society

In a modern society with increased mobility, there has been increase in migration and rise of diverse ethnic group in host countries. The issues of identity of individuals and groups along with the concept of immigrants becoming of member of the adopted country with preexisting socio-economic features has been widely contested. Merja Pentikainen (2008, p.12) believes that there are four ways that immigrants can integrate to the society: assimilation, integration, segregation and marginalization. She further defines assimilation as replacing one's identity with that of the adopted country, integration as the capacity of accessing the features of the host society, segregation as exclusion of the immigrant from the society and marginalization which means to lose one's identity and also excluded from the host society (Pentikainen, 2008, p. 12). As far as policies that are adopted by the nation in response to immigrants, according to Gary Freeman (2004, pg. 2), there are four policy strategies which are exclusion, assimilation, integration and multiculturalism that states have implemented to order to address immigration. Firstly, immigrants are completely excluded from the state with highly restrictive citizenship laws which include migrants from political participation and culture; secondly there is goal of unity through assimilation theory where immigrants are encouraged to blend with the host country to create social homogeneity (Freeman, 2004, p. 3).

Scholars such as Coello (2010, p.16) and Penttinen (2008, p.13) agree that assimilation aims to eradicate cultural differences between various groups by encouraging immigrants to adopt social and social practices that makes them indistinguishable from the dominant culture; these practices are encouraged to inspire national identity and allegiance towards the adopted country (Penttinen, 2008, p. 13). Thirdly, there is integration through state strategy of non-discrimination without the requirement of blending with the dominant culture (Freeman, 2004, p. 3). Fleras (2009, p.45) defines integration as a socioeconomic concept which imply that individuals are treated equally and included in the society that is “held together not by a single national culture but a common body of institutions and values that ensure uniformity and predictability”. Furthermore, integration encourages immigrants to become an active member of the society by participating and internalizing the social, economic and political valued of the host society (Fleras, 2009, p. 47). Joachim (2006, p.3) believes that integration is the middle ground between assimilation and multiculturalism as he views multiculturalism as equal coexistence of various cultures and integration as co-existence of communities where individual can influence the dominant society as well. Multiculturalism encourages a diverse culture and harmonious society (Freeman, 2004, p. 3). Multiculturalism and integration has become extremely common and popular in the contemporary society. Multiculturalism theories entail the rights of immigrants and minorities are recognized and that states create policies that promote the participation in society while maintaining their own cultural communities (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 153). According to Coello (2010, p. 22) multiculturalism “respects the right of each individual to choose their own personal identity, that explicitly recognizes the individual right and provide space for individuals to manifest these identities in both the public and the private sphere without imposing a common or national identity on individuals.” (Parekh 2000, p. 3) argues that “multiculturalism is about cultural diversity or culturally embedded difference”.

Multiculturalism policy has been extremely popular in the contemporary world to address immigration challenges developed in Canada and Australia in 1990s. The popularity of the multiculturalism policy can be attributed to the fact that it aims to provide voice to the minority people by introducing measures that can help represent the ethnic minorities in the political arena, it provided autonomy to a minority, provide greater access of the services to the minorities and also provide exemptions from laws and regulation based on their culture and tradition (Murphy, 2012, pp. 31-39). However, Scholars are critical of multiculturalism model as they believe that promoting multiculturalism will assert the loyalty of an individual to their community rather than the national that can hinder in the group participation in the nation's social, political aspects of the nation (Bloemraad, Korteweg, Yurdakul, 2008). Indeed some believe that multiculturalism only creates an illusion of change and integration without addressing the concept of power and privileges (Fleras, 2009, p. 8). Similarly, some believe that multiculturalism itself might promote assimilation since the minority groups will not have any alternative because of the illusion of change and integration (Coello, 2010, p. 24).

CHAPTER 3. Historical Background

3.1 Immigration History of Nepalese

The immigration history of South Asian in Hong Kong can be traced back to 19th century when migrants from the Indian subcontinent established themselves under the British colonial rule with majority engaged in civil service related jobs in police and soldiers as British subject (Tsung & Gao, 2012). The Nepalese, on the other hand, initially came to the Territory in 1948 as part of the Gurkha Brigade of the British Army (FEONA, 2000). The Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 granted right of abode (ROA) to the Gurkhas and to all Nepalese children born in Hong Kong prior to 1983. Since the early 1990s, many Nepalese have exercised this right and migrated to Hong Kong. (Tonsing, et al., 2012).

The year 1997 indicated the end of colonial rule and initiated the beginning of the process of “sinicization” or “mainlandization” (Lo, 2007). Ma (1999, p. 83) defines sinicization as the process of “the recollection, reinvention, and rediscovery of historical and cultural ties between Hong Kong and China” and as a result Hong Kong has gradually incorporated policies and practices of mainland China. Scholars believe that since the 1997 handover, the prospect of progress and improving their status in society has been very limited for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong (Tsung, et al., 2010). For instance, even though ethnic minorities are allowed to reside in Hong Kong, they are not recognized as Chinese citizens.

Similarly, after the handover Hong Kong has adopted of Putonghua and Chinese languages in education system. Such measures have been detrimental for integration of the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Ethnic minorities’ students now have fewer options for attending secondary schools and are compelled to join schools of low quality (Tsung & Gao,

2012). The British rule that spanned over 150 years has left a profound effect among people of Hong Kong in pertaining superiority of whites in comparison to non-whites, western culture was seen as superior to other cultures. The cultural supremacy not only aggravates personal racism but also influence institutional racism which then excludes ethnic minorities from participating in the mainstream society. The handover of Hong Kong to China from the British has not change for better.

3.2 Nepalese Society and Legacy of Caste System

The central feature of caste system in Nepalese society has received little attention in minority literature of Hong Kong. The caste system is deeply embedded and incorporated in every aspect of Nepalese political, economic and social structure. According to Britannica definition, “caste system is classification of people’s role, function and position in the society is determined according to their birth and occupation” (Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2013). The caste system of Nepal originated from the Hindu system of hierarchy which include Brahmins (priests) which are believed to have come from god-creator Brahma’s mouth; Chhetris (warriors) who came from Brahma’s arm; Vaisyas (traders and artisans) from Brahma’s thighs and the Sudra’s (farmer and laborers) who were born from Brahma’s feet. Those who didn’t fall under the four categories were considered as untouchables who were segregated from the society (Zoe, Le Bas and Bell, 2008).

The institutionalization of Hindu system of caste hierarchy as a basis of a unifying a diverse ethnic groups under unifying social organization dates back to 1854 with the consolidation of five-fold classification of Nepali society under law of legal code called “Muluki Ain” (Riaz & Basu, 2007, p, 71). These five-fold classification can be further distinguished into two categories that are determined by high caste segregating low caste and according to the law of 1854 members of these lower castes were enslaved as a punishment

for not abiding with the law. According to Kohrt, et al., 2009, the five fold caste classification allocated in the Muluki Ain can be represented as follows:

Table. 1. Caste hierarchy in Nepal according to Muluki Ain (1854)

<p>Category I castes: May not accept water from Category II castes</p>
<p>1. Wearers of the Holy Cord: Twice Born (Brahman & Chhetri)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upaadhayaya Brahman (priests), • Rajput/Thakuri (warriors), • Jaisi Brahman (priests), • Chhetri (warriors), • Newar Brahman (priests), • Indian Brahman (priests), • other Newar
<p>2. Non-enslavable alcohol drinkers (Indigenous Janajatis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magar, Gurung, Sunuwar, Limbu, Tamang, Rai other Newar, Matwaali Chhetri (Khas)
<p>Category II castes: may not share water sources with Category I castes</p>
<p>3. Enslavable alcohol-drinkers (Indigenous Janajatis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tibetan descent (Bhote), Chepaang, Kumaal, Haayu, Thaaruru
<p>4. Impure but touchable castes (Indigenous Janajatis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newar butchers, musicians, tanners, and washermen; Muslims, Europeans
<p>5. Untouchable castes (Dalits)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blacksmith (Kami), Tanners/cobblers (Sarki), Tailors/musicians (Damai), Minstrels (Gaaine), Musicians (Badi); skinnners, fisherman, and scavengers

One of the unique feature of Nepalese in Hong Kong is the fact that majority of the Nepalese in Hong Kong belong to the indigenous janajatis under category I of Table 1 of non-enslavable alcohol drinkers such as Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu and others who traditionally

occupied the middle category in the caste system. Favored by the British army for their martial abilities and fierce loyalty, these groups came to Hong Kong as a part of the British army in colonial Hong Kong and settled after the handover. These groups of marginalized ethnic groups have incorporated the caste system as their identity and aspect of the system is evident in Nepalese community in Hong Kong.



CHAPTER 4. Survey: Summary of Survey Findings

In the first stage of my research, I conducted a surveys of Nepalese community from to understand the difficulties encountered in Hong Kong. The survey comprised of personnel information to provide a profile of the respondents, difficulties encountered in Hong Kong regarding education and employment, knowledge regarding the support services, experiences of discrimination and their affiliation to their ethnic association and community. Then, a series of interviews were conducted during the second stage of my research to have an in depth understanding based on understandings and findings.

- **Personal Information:** A total of 106 surveys were conducted, out of which 51 were male (49%) and 54 were female (51%). 35% of the interviewees were between the age of 31-40, 27% between the age between 18-35 and 18% between the age of 41-50. 36% of the participants belonged to Magar ethnic group, 21% Limbus and 17% of the participants were Gurungs. An overwhelming 70% of the participants were Hindus followed by 14% Buddhist and 10% Kirat. Similarly, 74% of the participants have been living Hong Kong for the last seven years and 5% were born in Hong Kong. 49% of the participants lived in Yau Tsim Mong, 22% lived in Yuen Long with 88% living in rented apartment with family.
- **Education and language proficiency:** 43% of the participant had secondary level education, 21% had primary level education, 11% had bachelor's degree, 10% had college degree, and 7% was graduate. 81% of the participants received their education in Nepal, 14% in Hong Kong and 5% in other places. 16% of the participant had children with secondary level education, 12% with primary level 10% with college level and only 2% with bachelor's degree. Majority of the participants had professional level of Nepalese spoken (83%) and read and write (48%) language proficiency. Similarly, 37% of participants spoke intermediate level of English and 29% could read and write in English

language. 59% of the participants could speak basic Chinese and 10% could write basic Chinese as well.

- **Occupation:** 17% of the participants worked in the construction industry followed by 13% worked in food & beverage industry and 12% worked as security guard 7% worked in cleaning. On the other hand, only 5% worked in professional, executive position, 9% worked in community, social or educational sector and only 2% were from business and transportation each. Furthermore, 6% of the respondent was students and 7% housewife.
- **Difficulties in Hong Kong:** 63% of the participants had language difficulties, 20% had difficulty at work, 17% had difficulty in education, 13% had financial difficulties and only 3% didn't have any difficulties. 48% of the participants had language problem while searching for employment, 21% cited lack of network in finding jobs, 16% responded that Nepal's qualification is not recognized in the labor sector, 14% had low education level and 13% cited low wages. Similarly, 24% had no difficulties in searching for employment and none of the participants thought that they have been rejected due to their ethnicity.

Furthermore, language barrier was also one of the main concerns for the participants in accessing the education services for the participants. Nearly 35% of the participants had language problems and 26% of the participants had difficulties due to the limited choice of schools for the Nepalese students. 12% of the participants didn't have any problems with education in Hong Kong and only 4% of the participants responded that they had difficulty in education due to the fact that Nepalese qualification was not recognized in Hong Kong.

- **Coping Mechanism:** Majority of the participants 63% asked for their family member's help during difficult situation and 52% preferred the help of their friends. Only 7% and

5% have contacted their community leaders and religious leaders respectively and only 7% have contacted support centres and social workers while facing with difficult situation. Similarly, 71% participants preferred to ask the help of their friends and families in difficulty with 19% preferring government agencies, 10% preferring community leaders and 9% preferring support centres established by the government

- **Usage of Public Services:** The participants 71% of the participants had used medical and health services, 15% has used educational financial services, 14% has used support centres services. However, only 9% has used employment services of the labor department and financial assistance and only percent each has used social worker and legal aid services provided by the government. 63% of the participant responded to have been aware of the services through friends and family.
- **Integration in Hong Kong:** 60% of the participants responded that positive attitude, no discrimination, equal job opportunities and equal education opportunities were the main characteristics of the integration. Similarly, sharing and cooperation, equal share in resources, respect and politeness, support and tolerance also considered important features of integration. The participants were divided in responding to the question of whether Hong Kong was an integrated society. 35% said HK is an integrated society, 34% responded negatively and 26% were not sure. Similarly, 46% of the responded didn't consider themselves as HK citizens due to language barriers (49%), cultural differences (34%), living environment (11%), lack of political representation (10%) and lack of information (8%). 31% of the respondents though themselves as HK citizens and nearly 22% were not sure. 56% of the participants has never voted in election. Regarding the question of responsibility, 77% of the participants felt that integration is the responsibility of the government, 72% also believed that individuals are also responsible. 65% responded that ethnic community organizations are responsible; nearly 40% believed

integration is the responsibility of community leaders and Nepalese NGOs and only 22% felt that it was responsible for local NGOs.

- **Discrimination against EM:** 34% of the participants were not sure regarding discrimination against ethnic minorities. 28% of the participants responded that there is discrimination against ethnic minorities, 14% were not sure. When asked if they have experienced discrimination in Hong Kong, 24% of the participants haven't experienced any discrimination while 23% felt that they were discrimination in housing, 20% in education, 18% in employment, 12% in medical and health services and 7% said other such as the public attitude in society and while shopping. 59% of the participants had never heard of Equal opportunity Commission and only 28% have heard of EOC. Furthermore, none of the participants has filed a complaint in the EOC.
- **Nepalese Ethnic community:** 70% of the participants were member of their ethnic group and 58% have participated in program organized by their ethnic groups such as gatherings in festivals, social events, annual meeting, BBQ and parties. However, only 29% have participated in events organized by other ethnic groups and only 34% have participated in programs organized by Nepalese. When asked if there is any hierarchy of caste system in Nepalese community in Hong Kong, 62% of the participants confirmed that there is an issue of caste in Hong Kong and majority commented that caste system can be seen overwhelmingly in employment.

CHAPTER 5: Education of Nepalese in Hong Kong

5.1 Hong Kong education system

Education is a fundamental human right. And it has been established that education is the key to the development of individual and the society. During recent Legislative Council Panel on Education policy address on 16th January 2013, the chief executive stated the goal of Hong Kong education as “nurture talents so that the citizens can develop their full potential to create the best life possible for themselves and their families while contributing to the development of Hong Kong for all”. However, these goals are not being realized by all in Hong Kong.

The education system in Hong Kong comprises of privately run preprimary education is provided for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years at kindergartens and government public schools provides free and universal education from Primary 1 till Secondary 3 for all children between the ages of 6 and 15 years (Education Bureau: The government of HKSAR, 2013). Central allocation system is applied for admission of Primary 1 students which takes into account factors such as language proficiency and Non-Chinese speakers are placed in Hong Kong secondary school that has traditionally accepted ethnic minority students, and at which English is the medium of instruction (Gu & Patkin, 2013).

According to 2011 Population Census Thematic Report on Ethnic Minorities published by the Census and Statistics Department of the government, the attendance of ethnic minorities in schools compared to the rest of the population is quite low especially for the age group of 19-24. Only 13.4% of people 19-24 attended post-secondary education compared to 43.8% for the whole population, similarly, the attendance rates for age group 3-5 and 17-18 were 86.9% and 75.7% compared to 91.3% and 86.0% for the whole population

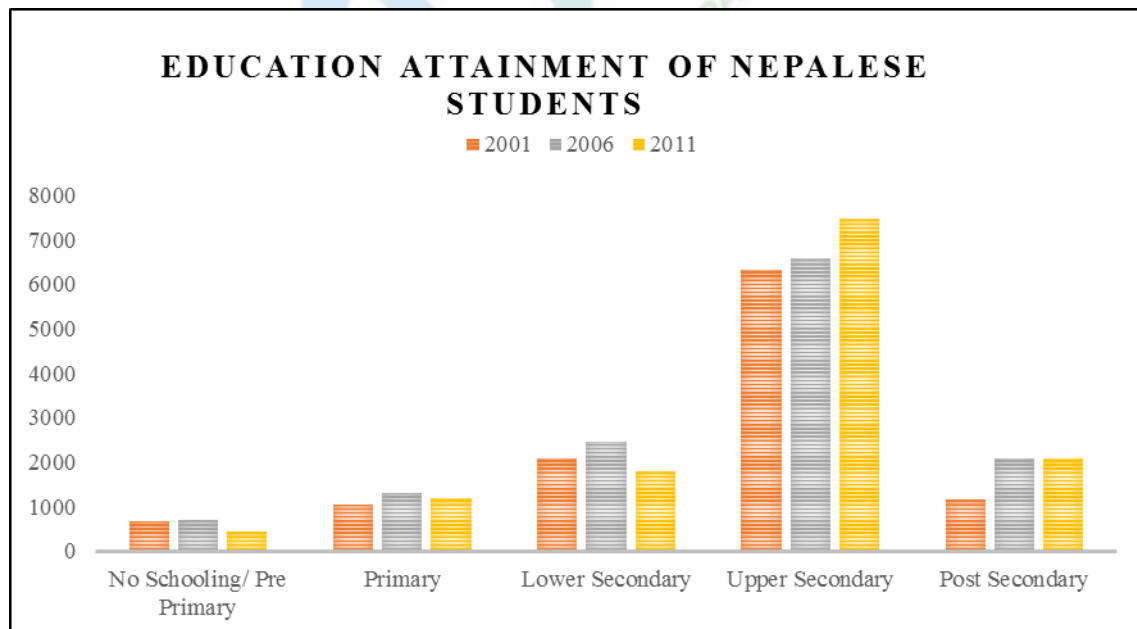
(Census and Statistic Department, 2012). The situation of Nepalese students in Hong Kong is also reflective of the trend. Similarly, the number of students attending post-secondary is considerably lower compared to those attending upper secondary and the low attendance of the students is consistent through the decade as shown in Table1 and Table 1.1.

Table 2. Education Attainment of Nepalese Students

Year	No School/ Pre Primary	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post-Secondary	Total
2001	664 (5.9%)	1,033 (4.2%)	2,089 (18.6%)	6,321 (56.1%)	1,152 (10.2%)	11,259
2006	680 (5.2%)	1,290 (9.9%)	2,450(18.8%)	6,569 (50.3%)	2,069 (15.8%)	13,058
2011	433 (3.3%)	1,190 (9.2%)	1,789(13.8%)	7,463 (57.6%)	2,081 (16.1%)	12,956

. Source: 2001 Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities

Table 2.1 Education attainment of Nepalese Students



Source: 2001 Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities

In 2001 only 10.2% Nepalese students attended post-secondary as compared to 56.1% Nepalese students attended upper secondary, in 2006 only 15.8% attended post-secondary while 50.3% students were enrolled in upper secondary and in 2011, only 16.1% attended post-secondary while 57% attended upper secondary.

5.2 Marginalization of Ethnic Minority Students

Heung (2006) states that the majority of secondary schools in Hong Kong used English as the medium of instruction before 1998, which switched to Chinese after the handover resulting in only 114 schools using English as teaching medium compared to 307 schools before handover. Similarly, out of 104 schools, there were also international English medium school which was not financially viable to Nepalese limiting their choices of school even more. However, in 2005 the HKSAR government announced reform to education policy in regards to the limitation of ethnic minorities by allowing ethnic minorities to attend mainstream schools which will allow ethnic minority to compete with their local students counterparts. Heung (2006) believes that the 2005 policy had the potential of allowing 45 percent ethnic minorities to attend local Chinese schools and they will no longer be restricted to the limited 7 or 10 schools that cater to ethnic minority students. However, after eight years of the policy reform to allow minority students to attend mainstream schools and efforts towards increasing student's Chinese proficiency has no significant impact on ethnic minorities' aspirations for higher education. In fact, the report published in July 2011 by the Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong titled 'Education for All: Report on the Working Group on education for Ethnic Minorities' clearly states that ethnic minorities students are discrimination and excluded by the Hong Kong educational system.

Major factors that marginalized Nepalese student have been limited choice of schools, language barriers, low quality of available education institutions and lack of information has obstructed ethnic minority's high education goals. In the survey of 100 people, 54% of the participants responded that they had difficulty with education system due to language barriers, 25% lacked knowledge about the Hong Kong education system and 22% felt that the option for schools for ethnic minorities are very limited. Furthermore, 20% of the participants also stated that they could not further their education because their Nepalese qualification was not recognized by the Hong Kong government. The Hong Kong SAR government has managed to overlook the issue of post-secondary education for ethnic minorities. According to the admission requirements posted on university web sites (City University of Hong Kong, The University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University), Chinese language is one of the requirements for undergraduate admission and there flexibility of requirements mentioned for ethnic minority students.

In addition, the government of Hong Kong has also supported other independent statutory body such as Employees Retraining Board (ERB) who has been dedicated to addressing the lack of skilled worker in the ethnic minority community. The ERB implements vocational and skill development training programs specially targeted to ethnic minorities to help enhance their job opportunity. These courses include catering, social services, hairdressing, healthcare services etc and are also highly subsidized to the eligible ethnic minority who are not able to reimburse the full payment of the course (Employees Retraining Board, 2012). However, most of the courses are not taught in English language limiting Nepalese youth and those offering English medium courses don't appeal to all Nepalese student's interests. Some viewpoints of education difficulty faced by Nepalese students are as follows:

Fanjung Limbu, a recent Form 7 graduate who took GCSE Chinese remarked that the Chinese language proficiency level is a major challenge for Nepalese students. He remarked that even if he have intermediate level of Cantonese language skill it is very difficult for him to find colleges and schools that accept his GCSE marks. He feels that Chinese language course offered in ethnic minority school is very basic. He has been rejected by some engineering schools he applied for and is contemplating going to work in construction rather than pursue higher education, even his parents are encouraging him to look for a job instead. He remarked that he really wants to pursue higher education unlike his friends who didn't even aspire to complete Form 5 as they didn't put any effort in their studies. He said his friends are well aware of the limitations in the higher education and opted to work instead. He feels that one of major reason behind the lack of language proficiency is the segregation of Chinese speaking and Non-Cantonese speaking students. He feels that his Cantonese language is limited as he didn't have interaction with the local students to practice his language. Majority of his classmates were ethnic minorities and he only met some of local students during English language classes. Similarly, majority of the schools didn't recognize his GCSE Chinese as fulfilling the language criteria and majority of the classes had Chinese as teaching medium. If he fails to find schools or colleges that accept his qualification, he will have no other option than to join the work force.

Similarly,

Sarin Ale who is currently doing higher diploma course in HK Space really had a hard time while applying for her diploma course Hong Kong because of low quality of education in Ethnic minority school. When she first arrived in Hong Kong, she had difficulty getting information regarding the education system and was

disappointed in the limited number of schools to choose from. She said that she did very well during her initial year coming top of her classes which assured her higher education aspiration. However, she didn't receive good results in her Hong Kong Diploma for Secondary Education and didn't qualify for the university requirements. She believes that the quality of education in ethnic minority schools is very lacking and she even had difficulty in finding colleges. Furthermore, she professed that initially HKSPACE didn't recognized her qualification stating that she didn't have Chinese proficiency even though the medium for her selected course was in English. She had to request her old school to issue extra certification and constantly communicated to the management of her college regarding her language requirements and in the end she was accepted to the school. She told me that if it was any other person they would have been discouraged to apply. As a permanent citizen she is surprised that she have to fight for her right of education and feels that the institution are not very accommodating to the Non-Chinese speakers.

5.3 Educational Support to Ethnic Minorities

Hong Kong has taken gradual but significant stride towards improving the status of Ethnic Minorities. Even though Hong Kong had ratified the International Convention of the elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination in 1969, the Hong Kong government only initiated the legislative process for the Race Discrimination Bill in 2006. The Race Discrimination Ordinance which provides protection to the ethnic minorities from discrimination in employment, education and other services came into full effect only in 2009 (Law & Lee, 2012). Since then, Hong Kong has initiated integration policy and programs that plans to provide assistance to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities in the community, address racial discrimination and promote equal opportunity for ethnic minorities. The Hong

Kong government has made provisions for funds allocated to NGOs implementing programs for the ethnic minorities.

Since 2009, Home Affairs Department (HAD) has funded numerous programs to show the government's commitment towards racial equality in Hong Kong. Home Affairs Department started operation of four subsidized support service centre in 2009 through established NGOs in Hong Kong. These Support Service Centres include: HOPE Centre (International Social Services HK) in Wan Chai, Hong Kong Christian Service Centre CHEER in Kwun Tong, Christian Action SHINE Centre in Tuen Mun and Jordan, Yuen Long Town Hall Support Service Centre in Yuen Long, New Home Association in Sham Shui Po and Jordan and TOUCH Support Service Centre at Tung Chung. These centers provide a number of support services to address the needs of ethnic minorities, including Cantonese and English language classes and after school tutorial classes. Considering the population of Nepalese, these support services are not sufficient to provide services to the population. Furthermore, there is a lack of quality education and capacity of the centers is not compatible to provide educational services to students and adults alike. The concerns of Nepalese parents are as follows:

Dev Kumar Limbu, whose children were attending Chinese primary schools is very concerned as they were unable to help their children with their home works and that private tutoring was too expensive for them. As both husband and wife work full time they don't have the time to monitor their studies nor does he have time to study the language himself. When asked if they had heard about the government funded after school tutorial classes in Support Centers for EMs, he remarked that the centers didn't provide quality services in the centers as the studies are limited to home work. He commented that some support centers doesn't have the capacity to provide tutorial

services due to lack of quality tutors and high number of students. He further commented that students from all standard are tutored together and the teachers only help if the student themselves actively ask questions to the teachers and some shy students are being left out. If Chinese language is being problematic in primary level, he is very pessimistic about his son's studies in secondary school and his chances of getting into a university.

The Hong Kong SAR government has made some provision towards providing services to improve proficiency of ethnic minorities that includes schools for ethnic minorities, comprehensive Chinese school-based curriculum, alternative international assessment (Shum, et al., 2011). Similarly, in regards to non-Chinese speaking students, the Chief Executive in his policy address plans to increase measures and services to better assist students to learn Chinese such as extended Chinese learning activities provide equal opportunities through establishment of Youth colleges and subsidy for Chinese language program, collaboration with ethnic minority communities, and more interactive programs for non-Chinese parents to participate with their children (Education Bureau HKSAR Government, 2013). However, for parents like Dev Kumar Limbu who have to work full time it is very unlikely that they will have time to participate in interactive programs.

Majority of Nepalese students have failed to attain higher education and it is evident that there is a need to address the major flaw in the system that marginalize ethnic minorities and denies them of their right for education obstructing their pursuit of socio-economic development. Integration to the education system has been one of the major issue for ethnic minority students and without proper education and inadequate Chinese language skill, ethnic minorities have no other option than to take lowest unskilled position and thus hindering their upward mobility in the society. The education for Nepalese in Hong Kong has been limited to upper secondary and the aspirations for post-secondary education have been unattainable for

majority of the Nepalese population. The result can be have repercussion in the future as lack of education affects the individual's opportunity for economic and social development



CHAPTER 6: Economic Situation of Nepalese in Hong Kong

6.1 Hong Kong Economy

Even in prosperous city such as Hong Kong, Nepalese community has not been able to acquire economic wellbeing and majority of Nepalese in Hong Kong occupy low status in the society. Economic prosperity of a country doesn't simply imply that all citizens of the country are economically sound. The gap between the rich and poor has been one of the characteristics of advanced economies and theorized in social polarization concept. Sassen (1991) states that the social polarization theory defines how poverty and social inequalities occur in economically advanced global cities. Lee (2007) states that in developed country there is a social polarization in which marginalized and underprivileged group emerges in economy that rely on knowledge, information and finance that creates high level employment for professionals as well as low level service industry that cater to the high level professionals resulting in wide gap between the rich and poor. Furthermore, it is plausible that these low level employment that often entails low skill and low pay are often times occupied by migrant workers (Lee, et al., 2007). The status of an individual especially of a migrant is dependent on the host country. In fact, Law and Lee (2013) clearly states that "economic wellbeing of an individual belonging to the ethnic minority is conditioned by the structural factors in his/her host society." Bun (2006) states that "in many cases, ethnic minority communities have in fact been living there for decades with subtle but institutionalized discrimination permeating their existence".

Hong Kong has projected itself as a society that accepts people of various ethnicities (Bun, 2006). After the handover of 1997, the Hong Kong government has been promoting Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan 'global/ international' city full of opportunities that are open to all people (Hong Kong SAR Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, 1999, pp. 5 – 16). Hong Kong

is considered as one of most competitive economy in the world. Hong Kong is a free market economy with GDP at \$375.5 billion USD. One of the main industry is the service sector that comprises of financing and insurance, accommodation and food services, and real estate, professional and business services contributed 92.8% into the GDP in 2012 alone. Hong Kong has 3.8 million labor force with 3.3% of the population unemployed (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

Hong Kong prides itself on free market society that provides equal opportunities to all. According to Civic Exchange, equal opportunity means “a society that gives individuals a fair chance to participate in all aspects of public life including employment based on the individual’s talents and abilities”. However, Nepalese in Hong Kong do not have equal opportunities in regards to employment and have been limited to low level employment hindering their upward mobility in Hong Kong society.

6.2 Marginalization of Nepalese in economic sector

The Nepalese in Hong Kong are employed in sectors such as construction, security, cleaning that entails long working hours often with minimum pay, poor working conditions. (Ashencaen Crabtree & Wong, 2012) Due to their martial heritage, Nepalese men are limited to security guards, construction workers, and nightclub bouncers which are seen as extension of their military background. The status of the employed ethnic minorities portrays a dismal picture, only 1.6 percent of employed Nepalese workers have managerial and an administration job which is the highest category of work in the Hong Kong Census, but 42.3 percent Nepalese work in elementary occupation which occupy the lowest category of occupation such as cleaners, street vendors, security guard and construction workers (Census and Statistical Department, 2012). The survey conducted in this research project reflects the employment statistics of the census department: 17% of the participants worked in the

construction industry followed by 13% worked in food & beverage industry and 12% worked as security guard 7% worked in cleaning. On the other hand, only 5% worked in professional, executive position, 9% worked in community, social or educational sector and only 2% were from business and transportation each. The monthly median income for Nepalese was HK\$10,000 in 2011 while the median income for the whole working population in Hong Kong was HK\$12,000 (2011 Population Census, 2011). Though the monthly median for Nepalese doesn't appear to be significantly lower than the whole working population of Hong Kong, the low level employment of Nepalese have longer working hours and low pay. For example, findings of a study in 2004 on Nepalese labor in construction sector stated that Nepalese workers in construction sites worked more than 60 hours a week in poor working conditions such as lack of ventilation, sanitation and access to clean water in order to get their salary comparative to their Chinese workers counterpart (Frost, 2004).

6.3 Job Mobility and Low Income Poverty Cycle

The marginalized position in regards to job-seeking and education has perpetuated a cycle of poverty among ethnic minority and hindered their prospects of better life in Hong Kong (Collins, 1998). One of the major reasons for Nepalese in Hong Kong having limited employment options is the fact that Nepalese qualification are not recognized in Hong Kong and most of jobs requires Chinese language proficiency. As recent migrants, qualified Nepalese are struggling to enter the labor force and are forced to take up menial jobs. Below is the case that highlights this issue.

Basna Limbu, who got her bachelor 's degree in commerce from Nepal, struggled to find a job in Hong Kong when she arrived ten years ago. Her qualification in Nepal was not accepted in the majority of the jobs that she applied for and her lack of Chinese language hindered her job search. Without any option, she worked in

restaurants for couple of years and tutored Nepalese students. She is currently working in a project that deals with the ethnic minority community that doesn't require her to speak Chinese. However, since the project is contractual her employment is not permanent, her hours are long, pay is low but she thinks it's a good alternative to working in bars and restaurant. She remarked that her option for high level position even in an NGO that works for the EM community is limited due to her lack of language. The project manager position for her project requires Chinese language proficiency. She says that the job pool for qualified Nepalese still hasn't changed and that Nepalese seldom can succeed in their chosen career and field. She knows a couple of qualified doctors, nurses or business degree holders that are working as bartenders, constructor workers or waitress in Hong Kong.

The nature of the employment has serious repression for Nepalese family in Hong Kong. Majority of the Nepalese family in Hong Kong have both parents working full time often times in jobs that have longer and unconventional hours leaving the children and youth on their own devices. Articles in Hong Kong newspaper such as The Standard (Chan, 2012) and South Morning China Post (Ngo, 2012) have reported in issue of drug abuse in Nepalese youth and lack of adult supervision and lack of opportunities in education, employment and services are often cited as the main reason behind Nepalese youth problem with drugs. Another informant told me his experience as follows.

Dal Bahadur Thapa, who has been employed as a security guard for the past twenty years said that he is content with his job. As a former member of British Army, there was no shortage of jobs in security guard for him. However, he remarked that sometimes it gets hard as he works the night shift for ten hours for six days a week. He never sees his wife and children unless his wife and children happens to have same days off. He doesn't always know what his children are doing and is thankful

that his children have not followed wrong path in Hong Kong. He says it is too easy for youths to get into bad habits such as drugs or criminal activity. He remarked Nepalese especially parents are in dilemma; in one hand both parents must work in order to provide for the family but if you do then the parents are not always there to look after their children and youth take on bad habits because parents are not there to control them.

During the surveys, 24% had no difficulties in searching for employment even content with longer hours and low pay. Some of the comments in regards to their employment were that at least in Hong Kong they have the chance to work and earn money compared to Nepal. Indeed, unemployment in Nepal is dismaying with 46 percent of the population without any jobs (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Nepal is also one of the poorest countries in the world with population of 30,430,267, out of which 25.2 percent people are estimated to be living on less than \$1.25 a day and a staggering 57.3 percent people are living on less than \$2.00 a day (The World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, Nepal has undergone decades of political instability and in comparison Hong Kong does provide security for family and finances. The alternative of for the Nepalese migrant in Nepal is unemployment, poverty and no prospect of the future. However, in Hong Kong they have employment that can provide provisions for their family. Furthermore, one of the respondents during the interview stated that they have to be willing to work in lower pay and longer hours as if he decides to leave there are hundreds who are willing to do his job in far less money.

6.4 Addressing employment challenges

In order to facilitate the job search for ethnic minorities, the labor Department of Hong Kong has initiated employment services in 11 Job Centers that include introduction to Hong Kong labor market, instructions on interview techniques, work trial scheme that allows participants to trial work for a month and recruitment center for the catering and retail

industry and organizing job fairs (Labour Department HKSARG, 2010). In addition, the government of Hong Kong has also supported other independent statutory body such as Employees Retraining Board (ERB) who has been dedicated to addressing the lack of skilled worker in the ethnic minority community. The ERB implements vocational and skill development training programs specially targeted to ethnic minorities to help enhance their job opportunity. These courses include catering, social services, hairdressing, healthcare services etc and are also highly subsidized to the eligible ethnic minority who are not able to reimburse the full payment of the course (Employees Retraining Board, 2012).

However, Hong Kong SAR government doesn't adequately address the challenges of Nepalese in employment. The services provided in labor department is lacking in providing proper guidance to the Nepalese searching for the job. For instance, in order to better assist the ethnic communities, the labor department of Hong Kong has English and Chinese language services available in regards to orientation, job vacancy and also has provision for interpretation services available on request (Labour Department HKSARG, 2010). However, availability of jobs that doesn't require a cantonese language is still limited and is one of the major challenges for the Nepalese community who doesn't speak cantonese. The services for ethnic minorities for employment are also limited to catering and retail industry. Similarly, the courses offered by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) are also limited courses taught in English and the courses available are low skill level jobs. For instance, in the ERB course Prospectus of April 2013 - September 2013, Diploma in Hotel front office management is taught in Chinese whereas English medium is used to conduct certificate in elementary book keeping. Similarly, courses in human resources and administrative assistant training, medical clinic assistant, networking engineering technical training is conducted in Chinese however, elementary courses in security courses, hair stylist, nail beautician is conducted in English

(Employees Retraining Board, 2013) . Therefore, majority of the Nepalese do not access these services but rather rely on their friends and Nepalese employment agency to find jobs.



CHAPTER 7: Social integration in Hong Kong

Nepalese are facing double discrimination by the Hong Kong society as well as from the trappings of caste system culture that are still apparent today. Nepalese in Hong Kong has been socially excluded from having access to resources, access to decision making and integration into the society (Bun, 2006). Similarly, Nepalese also have negative experiences with the local people in terms of interaction and attitude. Atkinson (2000) states social interactions and practices are also entrenched with exclusion and inequalities. In fact, positive attitude along with no discrimination, equal job opportunities and equal education opportunities are important to the Nepalese community as indicated by 60% of the participant in the research survey. Similarly, majority of the participants indicated that language barriers, difference in cultural values and living environment, lack of political representation and lack of information were the major difficulties faced by Nepalese that hindered their integration into the society. Furthermore, 23% of the participants has felt discrimination in housing, 20% in education, 18% in employment, 12% in medical and health services and 7% said other such as the public attitude in society and while shopping. It is evident that discrimination in Hong Kong is still persistent institutionally and in the society even after the introduction of race discrimination ordinance and implementation of integration policy and programs. This chapter will examine the factors behind the failure of integration of Nepalese community in the mainstream society by assessing the exclusionary history and isolation of Nepalese society, analyzing the integration policy of Hong Kong, and exploring the social division among the Nepalese community.

7.1 Exclusionary history and isolation of Nepalese community

The major setback on the Nepalese integration in the mainstream society has been the exclusionary history of Hong Kong and the geographical isolation of Nepalese community

from the mainstream society. The exclusionary ideology of Hong Kong government and people can be traced back to formation of Hong Kong identity to distinguish itself from people from China, Southeast and South Asians and its colonization history that imposed the ideal of superiority of race based on skin color (Sautman & Kneehans, 2002). Bun (2006) states that the economic boom of 1970's further reinstated the superiority of Hong Kongers over the population from underdeveloped regions. The attitude of the majority of Hong Kongers has not changed for better as ethnic minorities are faced with indifferent attitude of the local Hong Kong people and institutional discrimination in regards to education and employment as well.

Similarly, one of the major factor that has hindered the social interaction has been the fact that Nepalese community in Hong Kong are often pocketed in certain areas of Hong Kong and is a close knit community. The largest Nepalese communities are concentrated in Yau Tsim Mong and Yuen Long with 42% and 27.3% of Nepalese still residing in those areas. Law and Lee (2012) state that these Nepalese enclaves were formed after the handover when families decided to reside in areas such as Jordan and Yuen Long that had been British military barracks during the colonial period. Since then, Nepalese run grocery store, restaurants, salons that has minimized the interaction with the local and maximizing the social support within the Nepalese community. Jibeen (2011) states that the social support from the host society are an effective method to cope and adjust to foreign host culture. Indeed, 63 % participants of the survey relied on their family and friends in difficult situation and 71% of the participants preferring to receive help from their friends and families rather than other outlets such as government agencies or support services. Nepalese community became self-sufficient as a result of isolation from the mainstream society which in turn has hindered in the interaction and social integration with the mainstream society.

7.2 Hong Kong Social Integration Policy

Hong Kong has taken gradual but significant stride towards improving the status of Ethnic Minorities. Even though Hong Kong had ratified the International Convention of the elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination in 1969, the Hong Kong government only initiated the legislative process for the Race Discrimination Bill in 2006. The Race Discrimination Ordinance which provides protection to the ethnic minorities from discrimination in employment, education and other services came into full effect only in 2009 (Law & Lee, 2012). Hong Kong has initiated integration policy and programs that plans to provide assistance to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities in the community, address racial discrimination and promote equal opportunity for ethnic minorities.

The Hong Kong government has made provisions for funds allocated to NGOs implementing programs for the ethnic minorities to operate five support service centres and two sub-centres for ethnic minorities at various location in Hong Kong with an objective to enhance ethnic minorities' language proficiency and provide support services to assist their integration into the Hong Kong community (Home Affairs Department, 2013). Home Affairs Department of the Hong Kong government also directly funds for programs that to promote racial harmony in the community and promote the status of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Furthermore, to strengthen the integration of ethnic minority community to the local community, Home Affairs Department has launched five radio programmes including Nepalese language weekly radio program called Saptahik Sandesh (Home Affairs Department, 2013). However, the Nepalese in Hong Kong are largely marginalized and socially excluded that has hindered them into disadvantaged position in the society (Bun, 2006). The Nepalese communities in Hong Kong are living parallel to the mainstream society with no interaction between the two communities with majority of Hong Kongers not wanting to deal with other

ethnic minorities. The situation of Nepalese in Hong Kong as told by one of the community leader is as follows:

Mr. Saran Kumar Limbu, Commissioner to Nepalese Affair states that one of the main reasons behind problems faced by Nepalese is the language barriers and lack of policies that address this core problem. Similarly, he says that the programs initiated by the government are not successful. The support service centers are not providing comprehensive programs to enhance the language proficiency. He had attended some Cantonese classes but is unable to learn because there is a lack of quality Cantonese language course. He further states that running a class for Cantonese for few hours is not the way to enhance language proficiency. He also remarked that he didn't received any help from the local people as they don't like us and they don't help without any incentives or extend their friendship without looking to gain something out of the relationship. Apart from language classes, the support centers are also not successful in providing services to Nepalese. He further illustrated that the employment services for Ethnic Minorities are only limited to notices of vacancies in notice boards. He criticized that government programs are only limited to cultural shows or gathering events that do not make of point in addressing serious issues. He recommended that the government should focus in providing comprehensive programs to EMs such as instead of just posting vacancies in the bulletin boards, the centers should actively implement programs to visit potential companies or employers and inform companies about the candidates since they have taken the responsibility to provide employment services. Furthermore, he states that Nepalese have enough to eat, wear and have jobs but they don't have satisfaction in their life because there is strong racial discrimination. Because of cultural differences and language barriers, Nepalese are subjected to racial discrimination. He further

elaborates that language barrier in Hong Kong has hindered the progress of Nepalese in Hong Kong and that even though the government has developed policies to help Nepalese and guide you but has failed to help Nepalese to reach a level above their Hong Kong counterparts even if they are highly qualified and have more experience.

The sentiment of the ineffectiveness of the support services in providing competent Chinese and English language classes along with other services is also shared by service users. Furthermore, majority of Nepalese are not aware of the services and facilities provided by the government. The lack of knowledge regarding services and the inadequate capability of the support seen as common in Nepalese community as expressed by community worker interviewed:

Basna Limbu, staff of Ambassador Scheme for Ethnic Minorities project funded by Home Affairs Department stresses that there is a gap in knowledge of the Nepalese community in regards to the services provided by the government. As a community worker, she has found that most of the people are not aware of the services and those using the support services are not satisfied with the services provided. For example, she explains most Nepalese that there is no interpretation services in the language classes offered. Furthermore, majority of Nepalese people believe that their hardships are individual issues and are not aware of the fact that the difficulties they face are structural and policy related problems. She adds that Nepalese has always perceived Hong Kong as the place where they work; they don't have any attachment partly because they are not being accepted by the Hong Kong society. Firstly, she says that majority of the common Nepalese have no knowledge what their rights are nor have they heard of the equal opportunity commission or are aware of discrimination. Furthermore, she emphasizes that Nepalese especially the older generation are

hesitant in exercising their rights even though they are permanent citizens as they still feel as second citizen and fear that Hong Kong government can easily take their livelihood by kicking Nepalese out of the country. However, she feels that more and more Nepalese are beginning to understand the repercussion of tolerating the injustice especially for the next generation that are born and raised in Hong Kong and who consider Hong Kong as their home. Therefore, she feels that the government should focus on long term policy changes that can fully realize the integration of Nepalese in Hong Kong Society.

There is a significant gap in promoting the services provided by the government in order to ensure integration of Nepalese in the mainstream society. In the survey conducted with 106 participants only 14% has used support centers services and only 9% has used employment services of the labor department and financial assistance. 34% of the participants were not sure regarding discrimination against ethnic minorities. 28% of the participants responded that there is discrimination against ethnic minorities, 14% were not sure. Similarly, 59% of the participants had never heard of Equal opportunity Commission (EOC) and none have ever lodged a complaint in the EOC. The survey finding can be reflective of the overall situation of Nepalese knowledge in regards to their rights and services. For example, the Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) 2011/2012 reported only 67 Race Discrimination Ordinance cases were investigated out of 1,042 cases (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2011/12). The sentiment of “don’t bite the hands that feed you” is very strong with the Nepalese community. Even though the report didn’t distinguish the ethnicity of the ones that lodged a complaint, it’s fair to presume that information in the Nepalese community regarding important services is lacking.

7.3 Social division among Nepalese community

The Nepalese communities in Hong Kong are self-reliant and often seen as one unit, however, in reality Nepalese community is often divided based on caste system. The legacy of Hindu religion based in caste system is still enforced in Hong Kong. The internalization of the caste system culture of Nepal is embedded in the Nepalese society in Hong Kong. The recent decade long Maoist movement in Nepal resulting from ethnic grievances and political exclusion and inequalities among ethnic groups and various classes of the society has seen the proliferation of ethnic identity movement that has empowered ethnic minorities but at the same time resulted in greater division of these ethnic minorities (Lawoti, 2007). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Nepalese community in Hong Kong is comprised of mainly indigenous janajati people who in the caste system occupy middle status in Nepal. However, remarkably the culture of caste hierarchy still plays a role in the caste system among the janajatis in Hong Kong. Different ethnic groups have formed their own association in Hong Kong that organizes gatherings and entertainment programs. The main caste groups such as Magar, Gurung, Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Sunuwar, Sherpa, Newar have their own association in Hong Kong. It is also very common to have various sub groups branched off from the main caste groups. For instance, the Limbu community has sub groups association within its own caste such as Papohang Laoti Sayang and Lingden Sayang. The importance of ethnic associations as maintained by a community leader is as follows:

Rita Gurung, Vice-President of Tamu Association in Hong Kong tells me that it is important to have associations in Hong Kong to preserve Nepalese culture. She believes that the next generation who are born in Hong Kong needs to understand and be aware of their fore father's culture and heritage to continue the lineage further. These associations in Hong Kong provide social support and a sense of belonging to

the people who are often alienated from the mainstream society. She further adds that the programs conducted by the associations provide an outlet for Nepalese to cope with their hardships and difficulties in Hong Kong.

Indeed, Jibeen (2011) has stated that the social support from the host society is an effective method to cope with and adjust to foreign host culture. These Nepalese associations in Hong Kong serve the Nepalese community by organizing programs, events during festivals that provide Nepalese respite from their everyday life and strengthen their bond and share information. 70% of the participants in the survey were member of their ethnic group and majority of the participants have participated in program organized by their ethnic groups such as gatherings in festivals, social events, annual meeting, BBQ and parties.

Though mainly functioning as a unit to preserve the ethnic heritage, the result of having various associations has been the alienation of other caste groups and the reinforcement of caste hierarchy. The caste system in Hong Kong has played a role in favoritism of caste mainly in employment sector. In the survey, 62% of the participants confirmed that there is an issue of caste in Hong Kong and majority commented that caste system effect can be seen overwhelmingly in employment. However, some believe that the favoritism in employment is merely based on the reality of having limited resources and disadvantaged position of Nepalese in Hong Kong society.

Apart from the ethnic associations, there are also few Nepalese organizations in Hong Kong committed to provide assistance and protect the rights of Nepalese in Hong Kong. In the Home Affairs Department website (2013), there are four Nepalese NGOs listed with the department: Far East Overseas Nepalese Association FEONA, Hong Kong Integrated Nepalese Society, Hong Kong Nepalese Federation, Hong Kong Nepalese Women Association and Hong Kong Workers Union. Among these organizations, FEONA is one of

the first registered Nepalese organizations in Hong Kong to address the issue of discrimination and protect human rights. Similarly, the Hong Kong Integrated Nepalese Society is funded by the government with an aim to assist self-help and integration in the society. However, the programs implemented by these organizations are often limited to organizing cultural shows, dance competition and festivals. The ethnic associations and Nepalese organizations have failed to put forward core policy suggestions and advocate for education and equal opportunities for the Nepalese community of Hong Kong. The viewpoints of some community leaders are as follows:

Mr. Saran Kumar Limbu, Commissioner to Nepalese Affair, admitted that there is a divide among the Nepalese ethnic groups in Hong Kong. For examples, in the construction industry, one may find Gurung group, Magar group, Rai group and many other groups which dictates the hiring process for the job, for example, if a construction sites have Gurung in higher position than he influences only Gurungs to be hired. Consequently, he further said that on a construction sites often times a foreman will make things easier for employees of their own caste compared to other caste by giving them easy jobs and less harsh attitude. He further elaborated that there is a clear lack of unity amongst the ethnic groups. Furthermore, he believes that the Nepalese NGOs have not performed well on behalf of Nepalese people. Good leadership in organizations and groups is very lacking and he feels that there is corruption within the organizations but there is no investigation as they get support from some political parties. Similarly, there is a lack of transparency in organization's operation and the leaders of the community are not qualified and are only limited to organizing meaningless programs.

Another community leader addressed the following issues:

M.B. Thapa, Chairperson of The Ethnic Nepalese Federation of Hong Kong, believes that the Nepalese ethnic associations are progressing towards the unity to fight for common causes. He says that his organization is such unit that comprises of ten major ethnic associations from the major caste group such as Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu and others and that his organizations represents the collective voice of the Nepalese community. He further illustrated this by adding that the organization was successful in protesting against the appointment of Brahmin ambassador to Hong Kong and demanding an indigenous representative to the Nepalese government. Furthermore, he insists that the organizations are sincere in providing services to the Nepalese communities but they are unable to provide quality services due to lack of funding. He elaborates that organizations have to be transparent due to the strictness of the Hong Kong government, which makes them different from the NGOs in Nepal. He believes that the Nepalese ethnic associations are very supportive of each other and are united to voice and ask for their rights in Hong Kong.

Even though the two community leaders has expressed two different viewpoints regarding the roles of caste based association, the importance of the ethnic association is evident as one believes that the divide in association has hindered the process of acquiring rights of Nepalese while the other observes the progress and significance of ethnic associations to fight for the rights of Nepalese in Hong Kong. It is also evident that Nepalese in Hong Kong has been subjected to discrimination from Hong Kong society as well as from their own community. Nepalese in Hong Kong are subjected to unfair treatment by the people and the society based on the culture of exclusion and isolation of Nepalese in specific areas in Hong Kong. The isolation of the Nepalese community has made them self –sufficient but has also minimized the interaction of Nepalese with the local people. Furthermore, institutionalized exclusion of Nepalese has disadvantaged Nepalese in education and employment hindering their progress

in the society. These issues are amplified by the fact that there is a lack of comprehensive policy to address integration of Nepalese in the society and a communication gap between the government and the Nepalese community. Even though Hong Kong government has made provisions towards integration and inclusion of Nepalese in the society, there is little change in the society.



CHAPTER 8. Conclusion

In a recent Legco panel meeting of Hong Kong (TVB Pearl News, 2013) regarding support services for ethnic minorities groups, concerns were raised in regards to the low status occupied by ethnic minorities in Hong Kong which could potentially impair Hong Kong's economy. In the meeting Miss Ann Chiang, Legislator Kowloon West (DAB) stressed that if Hong Kong doesn't address the integration of Ethnic minorities then "ethnic minorities will remain on the poverty level taking up menial work that can become a time bomb for Hong Kong society" (TVB Pearl News, 2013). Poverty is correlated to high rates of crimes and drug abuse and has high economic cost in terms of spending in welfare, health care and other societal problems (Eitzen, Zinn, & Smith, 2011. Pg, 197).

This research has clearly indicated that language difficulties in education, employment and access to services have placed Nepalese in disadvantaged position that has affected their progress in the society. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness in Nepalese society that has further aggravated their difficulties in Hong Kong. Policy makers are not aware of the dynamics of the Nepalese society that has widened the communication gap and the services available to the Nepalese community have remained ineffective. Therefore, there is a need for equal access to education, enhanced employment opportunities and culturally relevant integration policies for Nepalese in Hong Kong.

8.1 Equal Access to Education

The major difficulty for Nepalese student has been limited choice of schools, language barriers, and low quality of available education institutions and lack of information which has adversely effected ethnic minority's high education goals. The HKSAR government has introduced the integration of ethnic minority students in mainstream Chinese schools to address the limitation of schools, however, the ethnic minority students are at disadvantage as

they don't have sufficient support from the school or from their home to improve their language proficiency. Without proper language skills and proper education, post-secondary education has been unattainable for majority of Nepalese population in Hong Kong which can have major repercussion in the future as lack of education affects the individual's opportunity for economic and social development.

The education system in Hong Kong has marginalized Nepalese students and there is need for comprehensive measures to address the education reform. Provisions to support and assist students to improve Chinese proficiency should be scaled up by addressing the lack of manpower and administrative resources in support centers, providing interpreters in language class to better guide students and improving the tutorial services by ensuring classes according to education level. Allocation for extra resources and support to implement programs to assist Nepalese students attending Chinese should be enhanced.

Furthermore, alternative curriculum needs to be introduced such as making Chinese as secondary language. Similarly, the HKSAR government makes special provisions to ensure flexibility in regards to Chinese language proficiency of Nepalese students for post-secondary education. University should review their policy regarding admitting Nepalese students and adopt mechanism to assess the qualification of Nepalese who completed their secondary education in Nepal. Furthermore, scholarships and financial assistance to Nepalese students should be scaled up to support Nepalese students acquire higher education. The education reform should include a holistic approach of implementing programs and policy reform to ensure better future for Nepalese students in Hong Kong.

Similarly, measures to ensure language proficiency for ethnic minority students through support services and parent's participation will not address education discrepancy for Nepalese students. There is a need for support centers as majority of parents are not able to

help their children with Chinese studies. However, the existing support centers are not effective as they lack competitive tutors and lack of adequate human and administrative resources. Feasibility of programs such as parent's participation can get better results if government takes into account of the fact that majority of Nepalese work in in elementary occupation which occupy lowest pay and long hours and cannot afford the time for extracurricular activities (Census and Statistic Department, 2012).

8.2 Enhancing Employment Opportunities

Nepalese workers in Hong Kong occupy marginalized position in regards to job-seeking which has perpetuated a cycle of poverty among ethnic minority and hindered their progress in the social ladder (Collins, 1998). Factors such as lack of Chinese language proficiency, Nepalese qualification not being recognized in Hong Kong along with availability of low income jobs in Hong Kong has limited the employment options of the Nepalese labor force in Hong Kong. Nepalese in Hong Kong are marginalized to low level employment such as construction, security guards and food & beverages industry. These low level jobs requiring high working hours, low pay and poor working conditions not only hindered the progress of Nepalese in Hong Kong but also can be detrimental to the progress of future generation.

Therefore, there is a need for measures the employment challenges of Nepalese population. The government should provide incentives to encourage the hiring of Nepalese. There should be a better mechanism to evaluate the qualification of Nepalese who did their education abroad. The government should ensure that qualified personnel are provided with trainings that help them get a proper job. Similarly, more courses should be provided in English for vocational training. HKSAR government should ensure that the labor rights of people working in low level and high risk jobs are not violated. The HKSAR should introduce

affirmative action to help Nepalese integrate to the Hong Kong Society. The government should promote diversity in the workplace by adhering to the corporate social responsibility to enhance the representation of ethnic minorities in the workplace.

8.3 Culturally Relevant Social Integration Policies

Majority of the informants and respondents shared the sentiment that the support services are not effective in competent Chinese and English language classes. Furthermore, there is a serious gap in the dissemination of information regarding the support services and other services provided by the government. Integration programs for ethnic minorities needs to be comprehensive to include more competent language programs. In order to enhance the effectiveness, provisions should be made to have translators in the language classes to assist those who have difficulty with English as most of the classes are conducted in English. As majority of the Nepalese population are unaware of the services, the government should scale up the promotion and revise their promotion technique to include local Nepalese newspaper, websites and ethnic organizations. The integration policy and program are very one sided as the mainstream society still aren't aware of the situation of Nepalese community. Mass media would be an effective tool to create awareness regarding the struggles of Nepalese in the mainstream society. Similarly, Nepalese NGOs should be empowered to implement programs in Nepalese community that are culturally relevant and socially accepted.

The Nepalese community in Hong Kong is divided among various caste association and organizations which has prevented the community to advocate for the right of Nepalese people as a singular unit. The ethnic associations are needed in order to preserve the culture and provide social support to the people. However, the division of Nepalese community has hindered the visibility of the Nepalese community in the Hong Kong society and even

sustained the caste hierarchy system in Hong Kong. Lack of knowledge regarding the services and their rights have further hindered the Nepalese community in assessing and asking for their rights. However, the ethnic associations in light to incident such as the 2009 shooting of Dil Bahadur Limbu by Hong Kong police has kept their differences aside to fight for the common cause (Wong, 2009). The community leaders should take the responsibility to empower people regarding their rights in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the community leaders should cooperate and coordinate movement to pressure the Hong Kong SAR government to address the issue faced by the Nepalese community in Hong Kong.



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