

How to promote multiculturalism in Hong Kong: Borrowing Western-based multiculturalism or co-creating one?

Dr Gizem ARAT, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Policy

The Hong Kong government and NGOs have been endeavouring to enhance the social integration of ethnic minorities in the sphere of education (e.g., Education Bureau n.d.; Hong Kong Unison 2018) and employment (e.g., Census and Statistics Department 2018; Equal Opportunities Commission 2019). In contrast to Hong Kong's promotion of being an international city, it is suggested that Hong Kong's social policy towards the social inclusion of non-Chinese individuals/groups is ambiguous (or highly concentrated towards integration through Cantonese language acquisition, particularly for public school pupils). Yet, wider social policy initiatives have yet to be defined as Hong Kong lacks a formal multiculturalism policy (Nagy 2014). Hong Kong lies in an oscillating space in the articulation of multiculturalism as it grapples with being tugged between the tripartite of: 1) deeper incorporation into the nation state (e.g. [2012 Guide of Moral and National Education] Wong et al. 2020), 2) the rise of localism (Kaeding 2017; Veg 2017), and 3) the status projection as Asia's World City (Brand Hong Kong Management Unit 2017). As such, there is no clear direction for Hong Kong's social policy towards incorporating ethnic minorities (non-Chinese) which could be observed in the existing version of the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) as reported by Loper (2001). A handful of reports (e.g., Legislative Council 2010) and scholarly work (e.g., Sautman 2005) have pointed out that the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) seems to fall short of determining how ethnic minorities are protected by social rights in many dimensions, such as religious freedom, linguistic diversity, and social integration of diverse minorities. This shortcoming in the RDO has been raised by social workers and other stakeholders closely working with ethnic minorities (e.g., Petersen 2007). Such is also echoed by scholars working in the social policy field in the Hong Kong context. For example, while some scholars (Erni and Leung 2014) suggest the social policy of assimilation, others mention the route of benevolent multiculturalism—the assimilation of ethnic groups to reach social harmony in terms of Chinese as a majority ethnic population. To this end, there is a critical need to examine the understanding of Hong Kong-based multiculturalism given that multiculturalism is complex and multifaceted which can cover an array of societal spheres,

such as“...modes of dress, language policy, race relations, religious freedom, education policy, court procedure and immigration” (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, p.2). Without any straightforward social policy on ethnic minorities’ integration, contemporary research on the ethnic minority topic is more likely to remain incomplete and disjointed.

In sum, there is an urgent need to co-create including all stakeholders (public, key community leaders, NGOs, policy makers) a Hong Kong-based multiculturalism for the promotion of social inclusion of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.