

Unresolved Tensions in Hong Kong's Racialized Discourse: Rethinking Differences in Educating about Ethnic Minorities



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When people rely on surface appearances and false racial stereotypes, rather than in-depth knowledge of others at the level of the heart, mind and spirit, their ability to assess and understand people accurately is compromised.

- James A. Forbes

Abstract The lack of Chinese language proficiency of Hong Kong ethnic minorities has frequently been cited as an inherent factor preventing their social integration. Beneath this assumption are racialized discourses that intensify the social boundaries between ethnic minorities and Hong Kong Chinese people. This chapter elaborates on some deep-seated issues relating to how ethnic minorities are racialized in Hong Kong. We argue that ethnic minorities are fraught with different levels of invisibility and racial normativity, creating a set of dilemmas on how cultural diversity is conceived in Hong Kong's wider social fabric. Using the notion of race as a starting point, the discussion highlights the dilemmas resulting from the invisibilities of ethnic minorities of color in the public discourse and the educational discourse and at a community level among non-Chinese residents. We argue that these racialized discourses operate differently toward white ethnic minorities who are provided unearned social and economic advantages within this city, solidifying further divisions. Clarifying the racialized discourses provides a means to delve into the normative inclinations of Hong Kong—how ethnic minorities of color are systematically and persistently rendered as outsiders at multiple levels.

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1 Introduction

Although legislation is in place to address racism in Hong Kong—e.g., 2008s Racial Discrimination Ordinance—the lack of systematic initiatives relating to multiculturalism (Jackson 2013; Kennedy 2011; Lee and Law 2016) makes it tempting to question Hong Kong’s readiness to embrace cultural diversity. A likely outcome of such a monocultural tendency is that conversations about race are not yet deeply entrenched in Hong Kong’s public and educational discourses. Such conversations tend to be confined within ethnically and linguistically diverse, non-Chinese communities, NGOs, advocates, and researchers who take interest in the experiences of ethnic minorities. What seems particularly problematic about this situation is the paucity of intellectual room for conceptualizing the racial experiences of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Given that Hong Kong constructs cultural diversity in different terms (Kennedy 2011; Lee and Law 2016) and the heterogeneity of its non-Chinese population, it must be pointed out that the extant literature on race still leaves a gap to grasp racialized discourses associated with ethnic minorities.

In this chapter, we contribute to the discussion of racial formation of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. We do so by laying bare some key issues regarding how race is conceived in the city’s dominant Chinese context. The central question addressed in this chapter is: how are ethnic minorities racialized in Hong Kong? In addressing this question, we discuss the usefulness of race as a conceptual tool in exploring the dominant racialized discourses pertaining to ethnic minorities of color in Hong Kong. The intention here is not to exhaustively describe what racism or its discourse entails. Rather, in unsettling the essentializing tendencies of the academic and public discourses, we will examine a body of literature on race and racialized discourses that account for ethnic minorities’ invisibility and racial normativity on Chinese-ness. Last, we will conclude by proposing research directions on how scholarship on race might be conceptualized and pursued, considering the specific cultural conditions of Hong Kong. This conceptual direction, we argue, will contribute to the understanding of deep-seated, but not always visible, racial tensions in Hong Kong.

For the rest of this chapter, we will refer to ethnic minorities of color as “ethnic minorities” as this is the discourse most often used by policy, the media, and Hong Kong’s educational system. However, we want to make clear that these discourses operate differently on Hong Kong’s white ethnic minorities, who are often referred to as expatriates and who reap unearned social and economic privilege in the city (Groves 2014, October).

2 Race and Social Meanings

Race has been a dominant concept in understanding the racial identities and inequalities of ethnic minorities in various culturally diverse and immigrant contexts. In this chapter, race is understood as a social construct rather than an individual’s specific genetics. The focus here is on how physical markers of individuals based on

lineage are socially constructed. In this sense, race is mutable, a sociohistorical concept (Omi and Winant 1994), in which individuals are classified, if not demarcated, based on skin color and appearance with links to their ancestry and morphology. This constructionist view of race has been favored among social scientists because of its usefulness in understanding how social meanings are ascribed to the physical characteristics of people: “Determining which characteristics constitute the race—the selection of markers and therefore the construction of the racial category itself—is a *choice* human beings make. Neither markers nor categories are predetermined by any biological factors” (Cornell and Hartman 1998, p. 24, emphasis added). In placing the choices surrounding the construction of racial categories, race needs to be understood in terms of how it has become subsumed in the broader narratives of a specific culture through the way people and institutions determine minorities as racial beings or perpetuate such understandings (i.e., who counts as ethnic/racial minorities? Who and what makes them count as ethnic/racial minorities? And, in the case of Hong Kong, what does it mean when the category of “ethnic minorities” discursively excludes its white residents?). Although drawing on data from before the 2016 census, in May 2017, Rachel Blundy of the South China Morning Post made this point explicitly,

Only 6 per cent of Hong Kong’s population is classed as non-ethnic Chinese, equating to about 450,000 people, according to the 2011 census. More than half of this group (about 270,000) are Filipinos and Indonesians employed as foreign domestic workers. The rest, *other than about 55,000 Caucasians mainly from Europe, the United States, and Canada*, are a diverse mix of races, including Indians, Nepalis, Pakistanis, Malaysians, Thais, Vietnamese and Japanese. The number of non-ethnic Chinese people in Hong Kong has grown since 2001, when it stood at 343,950, equivalent to 5.1 per cent of the population. (Blundy 2017, May 6, emphasis added)

To appreciate the idea that “[a]ny physical traits used to construct racial categories are culturally determined” (Lee and Law 2016, p. 84), it is crucial to overcome overly instrumental ideologies that tend to cast ethnic minorities as racialized individuals who fail to adhere to the values of ethnic majority. Spencer (2014) warned us of treating human behavior as “mere biology” or “mere pragmatism,” which underplays the symbolic forms of cultural representations, such as the intricacies of how people make sense their racial characteristics through their everyday life practices and how these characteristics are portrayed in the wider public: “Individuals are neither ‘cultural dopes’, reproducing dominant cultural forms, nor merely at the mercy of ‘hard-wired’ biological systems” (p. 101). In moving away from the view that racial characteristics are immutable biological differences, Spencer’s consideration is helpful in raising questions not about how different ethnic minorities are from ethnic majorities, but how ethnic minorities are *made* different. We suggest that these makings operate differently on ethnic minorities depending on the dominant society and who counts as the majority. As Meer (2014) reminds, “while race is a social construct it has real social and economic consequences. If we therefore choose to ignore race in public policy, we also ignore how racial categories are embedded in the routine practices of societies” (p. 117). To grasp the social meanings of race in Hong Kong, it is vital to examine the cultural factors that give rise to

the formation of racialized discourses in the city, enabling us to complicate how ethnic minorities are racialized in Hong Kong. In what follows, we provide a brief contextualization of how race issues in Hong Kong came to the fore as a backdrop to how race is culturally defined in the city's multicultural context.

3 Problematizing Race in Hong Kong

One of the pioneering studies on race issues in Hong Kong is Loper's (2004) documentation of ethnic minority students' encounters of racial inequalities. While Loper's study opened an avenue to critically examine what racial discrimination might mean, a more important implication of her study is how race has been a basis of discrimination toward ethnic minorities. Racism has been present in Hong Kong society long before Loper's study. Lee and Law (2016) cited a report on the death of Harinder Veriah, an Indian-Malaysian woman who allegedly received scant medical attention, as an example of racism, in which racial hierarchy was constructed based on color and appearance. As Lee and Law argued, building from colonialism, white people symbolize superiority, and individuals of color were inferior, providing a picture of the varied, yet prevailing, attitudes toward different races in Hong Kong.

Paralleling Lee and Law's argument was the findings of the racial acceptance survey conducted by Hong Kong Unison (2012). The survey findings revealed a wide discrepancy in the degree of acceptance of Hong Kong ethnic Chinese toward different ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong. For instance, Pakistanis, Nepalese, and black Africans were reported as the least accepted ethnic minority groups in the neighborhood, education, and workplace, while Japanese and white Americans were more accepted by Hong Kong Chinese. The survey findings indicate that the substance of racism and racist attitudes in the city still leaves open a room for debate. Yet, a clearer implication was the varied degree of acceptance toward different ethnic groups, constituting a racial hierarchy among Hong Kong residents.

Despite the presence of racial hierarchy among ethnic groups in Hong Kong, critical attention on racism is recent. One reason for such is the less than overt presence of racial discrimination in the city. Unlike in the United States, for instance, where racially motivated violent altercations are common, racism in Hong Kong seldom translate into large scale and sustained violence and hatred. In a study of Equal Opportunities Commission (EoC) (The University of Hong Kong and Policy 21 Limited 2012), South Asians perceived racial discrimination as a less than severe issue. This perception is perhaps reflected in the reports of EoC. In comparing the various discrimination cases it received, the EoC (2016) handled 52 complaints related to the Racial Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) out of 612 overall complaints (8.5%) in years 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. This is a relatively small figure. What seems to be pointed out more frequently is the unequal treatment toward South Asians in workplaces (Equal Opportunities Commission 2011), which could be seen as a subtler form of racial discrimination when compared to the violent ones in the US context.

On the other hand, systemic forms of racism receive more public attention, such as the limited access to Chinese-medium schools, segregating effects of schooling arrangements for ethnic minorities (Shum et al. 2016) and their difficulty in finding residential accommodation (Oxfam Hong Kong 2016). For systemic and individual issues as such, it is unclear how many of those have been brought up to the EoC. The implications of these studies and reports, however, seem to project a rather mixed picture of how racism is conceived in Hong Kong. That is, while racism is a feature of Hong Kong society (Kennedy 2011), its discourses remains invisible at many levels, as Lo (2015, June 8) quipped in his column: “Is Hong Kong a racist society? For the longest time, as a member of a local Chinese middle-class family, I didn’t think we were.” It is in this view that the city grapples with the idea of racism.

4 Potentials and Limits of RDO in Promoting Multicultural Initiatives

At a systemic level, racism is addressed in Hong Kong through the Racial Discrimination Ordinance (RDO), playing into the shaping of racial discourses of the city. In the RDO, race “in relation to a person means the race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin of the person” (Legislative Council 2008, p. 1). This definition, accordingly, makes it applicable to the discussion of racial characteristics and differences of nonethnic Chinese people in Hong Kong and vice versa. The RDO has clearly stated aims in combating racism, such as:

- To render discrimination, harassment, and vilification, on the ground of race, unlawful
- To prohibit serious vilification of persons on that ground
- To extend the jurisdiction of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EoC) to include such unlawful acts
- To confer on the Commission the function of eliminating such discrimination, harassment, and vilification and promoting equality and harmony between people of different races

These aims have become the cornerstone of EoC in processing complaints with respect to racial discrimination. The RDO is a much-welcomed initiative that aims to promote racial harmony, which is an effort that taps into the arena of cultural diversity in Hong Kong (Kennedy 2011). If systemic efforts are in place to promote racial harmony and, to some extent, cultural diversity, then why do dissenting voices—views that represent dissatisfaction toward the multicultural initiatives in Hong Kong—remain? Despite the successes in processing RDO-related complaints, EoC noted that their data are “far from satisfactory” in claiming Hong Kong as a city with low racism-related incidents (Equal Opportunities Commission 2014, p. 46). A possible explanation for this is the difficulty in advancing complaints to legal actions under the RDO (Kapai 2015). Kapai noted, for instance, some gaps in the RDO related to protecting ethnic minorities against the conduct of public bod-

ies. The legal details are worthy of attention, but they are beyond the scope of this chapter. An important implication of these gaps is that RDO is neither a panacea to stop racism nor a catalyst for promoting comprehensive multicultural initiatives. The fabric of racism in Hong Kong society must be examined if we are to understand how ethnic minorities are imagined within the public and education discourses.

5 Invisibility in Discourses of Public, Education, and Demographic Representation

Despite the growing body of literature accounting for racism, a deep-seated issue is that race remains a difficult concept to grasp in a city without a developed discourse on cultural diversity. While race and racism are by no means synonymous, it could be said that racism is in an outcome of how race has been culturally defined, particularly in the case of Hong Kong. Recognizing invisibility is an essential move to understand how race is defined in Hong Kong. In the context of ethnic minorities, invisibility is considered as a denial of “the existence of racially disparate treatment by consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or non-deliberately overacting, ignoring, or oversimplifying the problem” (Sun and Starosta 2006, p. 121). Without a broader multicultural agenda that explicitly recognizes and addresses racial displays and treatments in social structures, there exists a risk in narrowly defining race as mere physical markers. This definition of race is not divorced from discourses fraught with different levels of invisibility and racial normativity in Hong Kong that amount to exclusionary practices. These discourses and practices are important to iterate to arrive at a deeper understanding on the tensions in Hong Kong racialized discourses.

5.1 Invisibility in Public Discourse

Racial discourses associated with ethnic minorities has not been a prominent feature of Hong Kong historical texts. This is not to ignore the studies that have documented, for example, the presence of South Asian communities in Hong Kong under the British rule (Baig 2012; Erni and Leung 2014). However, the depictions of ethnic minorities in the broader societal discourse are far from ideal. A frequently pointed out irony in Hong Kong is its international image, as “Asia’s World City,” which is anchored merely on tourism discourse (Law and Lee 2012). This is because discourses on cultural diversity within Hong Kong barely surface in the “Asia’s World City” propaganda. This seemingly global outlook is rooted in a tourism discourse that reflects the international standing of Hong Kong as a financial hub in Asia and tourist destination. The cultural diversity *within* the city is barely promoted

as its broader social feature, except the confluence of Eastern and Western influences resulting from Hong Kong's colonial past. This colonial feature of Hong Kong implies that an uneven picture of the international community exists, which in many ways obscures the presence of ethnic minorities. What this opaque picture of ethnic minorities in public discourse amounts to is the scant recognition of their contribution to the city. As Erni (2012) noted:

Hong Kong is a "raceless" global city because of the historical amnesia it suffers: a forgetting of the fact that although the unprivileged ethnic minorities constitute only around 5% of the total population, they build distinctive communities, practice unique and diverse customs, and make a considerable contribution to the economic development of Hong Kong society. The persistent consignment of these minorities to menial occupations, in welfare discourse, and increasingly in episodes of crime, has contributed to a callous erasure of their presence, except in moments of social panic and moral wrath. (p. 83)

Erni's rationale behind his claim above rests on the "constant lack of social discourse about race and racism, whether in schools, at home, or in the media" (p. 83). Stated differently, the lifeworld and practices of ethnic minorities are not always within the purview of the Chinese community. Their media presence is limited to those who have played roles in local television series (Leung 2016) and those who have been reportedly unlawful in Hong Kong. More recently, Jackson and Nesterova's (2017) analysis of newspapers published by Apple Daily (a local news source) revealed how ethnic minorities had been stereotypically represented, despite the pro-multicultural stance of the news outlet. It was furthermore observed that the views of ethnic minorities were not adequately presented and those who were presented tended to be more successful and privileged. These portrayals together hint that ethnic minorities remain as "strangers" (Erni 2012) who "tend to be cast as transient populations uncommitted to Hong Kong civil society" (Bridges et al. 2016, p. 7). The perceived foreign status of ethnic minorities is not surprising, given that cultural diversity in Hong Kong is viewed merely as the coexistence of different ethnic groups (Lee and Law 2016) rather than real contact or integration. Such a coexistence neither implies a high degree of tolerance nor acceptance toward ethnic minorities. Interaction between Chinese and ethnic minorities is rarely explicitly promoted, except in only a handful of schools and organizations that conscientiously do otherwise. The limited presence of ethnic minorities in public discourse means that misunderstandings on their cultural diversity and characteristics abound. If there is a factor to be recognized in such an invisibility in the public discourse, it is difficult to ignore Hong Kong's treatment of cultural diversity in the educational landscape.

5.2 Invisibility in Educational Discourse

The educational support mechanism for ethnic minorities at a policy level is not conceived as a multicultural project, leaving open rooms for disagreements between the EDB and NGOs (Kennedy 2011). Such disagreements are also reflected in the inconsistencies between the goals of the EDB in facilitating ethnic minorities' smooth

integration (Connelly et al. 2013). As pointed out earlier, the RDO seems to protect, rather than promote, the rights of ethnic minorities, and its legal effects barely reach the education landscape. Although it would be unrealistic to account for the educational inequities within the scope of the existing legal framework, much is left unsaid about safeguarding and promoting the cultural rights of ethnic minorities in the current schooling arrangements in the local education system. Burkholder (2013) found that the experiences of ethnic minorities were barely consistent with the integrationist goals of the EDB. The schooling arrangements for ethnic minorities in most part failed to help them integrate in the wider Chinese community (Connelly et al. 2013). The education provision of the EDB, as Burkholder stated further, meant that learning Chinese was the key to become full participants in Hong Kong society. It is then of little surprise that Chinese language learning has been the central focus of the EDB in serving ethnic minorities, which is based on a need to remediate their Chinese language abilities. This is a pragmatic move on the government's part. An underside of this move, however, is the growing question on the government's "commitment to celebrating cultural diversity or to adapting the curriculum to meet the special needs of ethnic minority students" (Kennedy 2011, p. 169). Erni (2012) echoed Kennedy's point more forcefully:

Hong Kong as a raceless, global city has also emerged out of a near total abandonment of the teaching of the subjects of race and racism in either public or family educational domains. Never has serious attention been devoted to the study of these subjects in Hong Kong's education system. In other words, generations of Hong Kong people have been educationally blind to the existence of racial inequalities. (pp. 83-84)

Erni's comment speaks to the racial inequality in the education system. One of which is the racial segregating effects of the schooling arrangement for ethnic minorities (Cunanan 2011; Shum et al. 2016) brought by the focused support provided to schools with a "critical mass" of ethnic minority students. These schools were previously labeled as "designated schools." The segregating effect of such a schooling arrangement means that many ethnic minorities had been excluded from mainstream Chinese medium schools, which deprived them of opportunities to socialize with Chinese students and vice versa. The limited presence of ethnic minorities in local Chinese medium schools rendered them invisible to the social world of Chinese students. Although at the time of writing the EDB has stopped using the label "designated schools" and a number of new measures have been introduced (Education Bureau 2016), it is not difficult to observe the absence of clear multicultural policies besides "enhanced funding" to support schools' creating of "inclusive environment." Without clearly defining what is meant by an "inclusive environment," these discourses are unlikely to be taken up proactively to support ethnic minority students in Hong Kong's public schools. This lack of long-term and systematic multicultural initiatives conjures up another educational blindness that Erni described.

In the broader education landscape, such a blindness means that educational provisions for ethnic minorities are motivated not by cultural considerations but by pragmatic concerns to remediate their Chinese language issues. Except for the systematic efforts in upscaling Chinese language support measures, the government is rarely seen to be "taking affirmative action for ethnic minorities" (Kennedy and Hue 2011,

p. 351) to redress inequities in the education system. The instrumental motif of the government in the educational provision suggests that ethnic minorities' needs are yet to be met, which points to how their visibility is "masked by long held cultural values" (p. 352) complicit in Hong Kong's education system. These cultural values leave little room for developing culturally inclusive school environment for ethnic minorities, which, among several issues, are frequently associated with underdeveloped in-class diversity management and teacher training (Kapai 2015; Tsung et al. 2010). In aggregate, what still holds true in terms of the climate at the education policy level is that the initiatives designed for ethnic minorities are, as Erni and Leung (2014) aptly put it, meant to leave "the dominant society more or less untouched" (p. 128).

5.3 Invisibility in Demographic Representation

One of the key sources in understanding Hong Kong's racial diversity is the census data. Although the official statistics (Census and Statistics Department 2017) has listed the different nationalities of the 8% non-Chinese population in Hong Kong, the available data are not comprehensive enough to represent the racial diversity among different ethnic minority groups. This issue can be attributed to the previous data keeping and labeling practices on ethnic minorities. Ethnic-specific demographic information is not always kept by government departments (Kapai 2015). Understandably, the racial diversity of non-Chinese individuals in Hong Kong, despite their relatively small number, has presented challenges in making their demographic representation comprehensive. An example of this case is how Caucasian, representing racial groups from different Anglo Saxon contexts, is listed as "Whites" with no further breakdown of the figure. "Whites" represent a wide range of individuals from Anglophonic and European heritages with no specific reference to their ethnic or national origins. Other minority groups are listed as "Filipino," "Indonesian," "Thai," etc., representing their ethnic and national origins. The inconsistency in such labeling practice can dilute the representation of Hong Kong's racial demographics. It underrepresents certain minority groups, such as Germans, Americans, British, and so forth.

The presence of foreign domestic helpers (FDH) contributes to the invisibility of certain groups within ethnic minority communities. The official statistics (Census and Statistics Department, 2011, February 21) shows that Indonesians and Filipino are the largest ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong. The large influx of FDH contributes to this figure. Their presence, along with their occupational status, has given shape to how they are represented in the media and stereotyped in textbooks (Jackson 2016). As FDH do not enjoy a right of abode—meaning they do not have the right to settle in the territory and their presence is tied to work conditions, including residing in their employers' homes and working 6 days a week—rarely would they raise family in Hong Kong; they would typically return to their home country after their employment contracts expire and when they do not secure a new one. These circumstances mean that FDH communities are more transient who may

not necessarily consider Hong Kong as a permanent destination for residence. Care is, therefore, needed when interpreting demographic data relating to ethnic groups with significant FDH population.

Despite FDH's visibility in Hong Kong due to their occupational status and presence, a lesser visible and represented community are, for example, Filipinos who are residing in Hong Kong permanently or longer term. This community comprises a smaller group of Filipinos who work as professionals, such as musicians, engineers, and architects, and their children who were born and raised in Hong Kong (Gube 2015). Having interacted with different Filipino groups in Hong Kong, we have come to understand that Filipino residents are not always comfortable with stereotypes that conflate their occupational status with FDH. Experiences like this were observed among Filipino youths who were raised in Hong Kong (Gube 2015). A Filipino youth participant in Gube's study, for instance, preferred to be identified as "Filipinos living in Hong Kong" who were thought to be "more of like the residents," rather than "Hong Kong Filipinos" (which she perceived as a label representing Filipinos, including FDH, as a homogenous racial group) (p. 133). Another participant held a similar view, but highlighting the negative stereotypes associated with FDH (whom she mentioned as "maids") when asked to describe her ethnic identity:

If they ask me, I'll just say I'm Filipino. I do think twice. I don't wanna say it 'cause people have this stereotypical—if they're talking about Filipinos, they'll think we're poor, most of our people are working as maids and all that. (p. 134)

The struggles with the above stereotypes suggest that individuals within a single ethnic group construct their racial experiences differently. We highlight these experiences not to criticize the shortcomings of the census data, but to show how different racial experiences can be easily obscured when portrayals and perceptions on ethnic minorities are founded solely on such data—the majority population in ethnic groups (i.e., Filipinos and Indonesians are FDH). This perceived homogeneity can result in misconstrued portrayal of the identities of ethnic minorities. To complicate matters further, it has been reported that few Hong Kong (local Chinese) people show awareness on the disharmony among different ethnic groups in Hong Kong (Law and Lee 2013). The racial dynamics within ethnic minority communities could be underrepresented, thus contributing to the invisibility of and essentialist understandings on them.

The discussion on the different layers of invisibility indicates that representing the cultural and racial dynamics of ethnic minorities is not straightforward. These layers of invisibility can at many times intersect with one another and cannot be understood in isolation. The invisibility of ethnic minorities in public discourse can be promoted by their lack of visibility in educational discourse and demography (i.e., how ethnic minorities are portrayed in media could be caused by the lack of extensive education on their life in Hong Kong). It underscores the fact that what one understands about ethnic minorities stem from not a single discourse, but multiple, conflicting, or perhaps untenable discourses that obscure how ethnic minorities' lifeworld is (re-)presented. To further clarify the racialization of ethnic

minorities, it is important to recognize how racial normativity in Hong Kong undergirds, at least in part, the different facets of invisibility of ethnic minorities, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.4 *Racial Normativity*

To move beyond the narratives surrounding the monocultural tendencies of Hong Kong (e.g., Kennedy 2011), highlighting the racial ideologies in a Chinese context is necessary. In bringing racial normativity to the picture, one could be reminded of how discourses related to ethnic majority complicate how minorities are perceived as social beings. Karsjens and Johnson (2003) spoke of human races as social constructs, which are “products of the human mind’s indelible wont to classify phenomena into some meaningful semblance of order and thereby reflect the dominant culture and dominant ideology” (p. 22). This emphasis on social constructs points to how racial markers are interlaced with the broader societal narratives and dominant cultural ideologies of Hong Kong. What cannot be ignored accordingly is how the racial discourse of Chinese-ness intermesh with that of ethnic minorities. Meaning to say, how ethnic minorities are racialized is not just about who they are as racial beings, but also about how they become racial beings within the racial discourse of Chinese people.

What does race mean in a Chinese context? The fundamental idea of race can be understood in terms of racial consciousness in the historical context of China, often summed up in an old Chinese saying: *fei wo zu lei qi xin bi yi* (非我族類, 其心必異), translated as “Someone of not my race¹ must have a different mentality” (Webb 2015, p. 131). Arguably, this Chinese saying implies a sense of defensiveness against hostility, in which people who do not belong to the same race, nation, or culture are not considered loyal to the country. Although this sense of defensiveness does not necessarily apply to modern day Hong Kong in a literal sense, what can be borne out from such an outlook is a form of othering that underwrites how ethnic minorities are racialized:

Hong Kong’s cultural identity is formed through the otherization of non-Hong Kong people, including mainland Chinese, Southeast Asians and South Asians. The making process invokes the *racialization of cultural differences*, and the forming of representation of cultural differences between Hongkonger and non-Hongkonger was constructed in historically specific moments. (Ku 2006, p. 291, emphasis added)

The notion of Hong Kong Chinese-ness is made salient through the presence of non-Hong Kong Chinese people who do not conform to the cultural norms and values of the city. These cultural norms and values are represented by “language, vocabulary, clothing, behavior, attitudes, cultural tastes, habits, etc.” (p. 291), which are not biological but an interpellation of social meanings that define the racial

¹Goldin (2011, p. 236), however, somewhat differed from Webb’s translation by claiming that *zu lei* means “kind” and not race.

norms in Hong Kong. As such, the consciousness on racial difference is not difficult to discern within the purview of racial nepotism, where people belonging to the same race and sharing the same historical background (or those who exhibit cultural markers of local Chinese-ness) are favored than those who do not. To borrow Barth's (1998, p. 15) analogy, an individual acquires a social membership who play "the same game"; those who do not "play the game" are social others. Qualifying as a local Hong Kong person means that (s)he must exhibit cultural markers consistent with that of Hong Kong Chinese people, such as the ability to speak the Hong Kong variety of Cantonese and write traditional Chinese texts. Possessing Chinese language skills, however, is only one of the various cultural markers that an ethnic person can exhibit. This means that other cultural markers—values and lifestyle—must be exhibited to increase the likelihood in being recognized a Hong Kong person, such as dressing modernly that conveys "urban imaginary," behaving like educated individuals, not being backward, etc. (Ku 2006, p. 292).

Likewise, the literature is increasingly clear that the lack of Chinese language skills is not the only factor that prevents ethnic minorities to integrate in Hong Kong (Bhowmik and Kennedy 2016). Another layer within the discourse of racial normativity that needs to be considered is its effect in terms of privilege. This normativity is fueled by "a formation of local culture vis-à-vis the colonial cultural domination" (Fung 2001, p. 595), which conjures up what Lee and Law (2016) called "orientalist discourse." They pointed out that Hong Kong Chinese people construct a distinctive identity reinforced by a sense of superiority arising from the colonial discourse:

Hong Kong is a modern, cosmopolitan, and urban society exposed to Western acculturation; thus, it is much better than the home countries of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities. If Filipinos, Indonesians, Indians, Nepalese, Thais, and Pakistanis cannot make their countries as wealthy as Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Chinese may ask how they could contribute to Hong Kong's prosperity. (p. 105)

A feature of this racial discourse appears to be speaking to the status of non-Caucasian ethnic minorities from developing nations. The perceived inability of ethnic minorities to improve the economic situation of their home countries and the economic prowess of Hong Kong society constituted a status hierarchy, rendering ethnic minorities as second-class citizens. This perception is tenable when one turns to Hong Kong's labor demographics, in which ethnic minorities occupy a sizeable portion of the low-paying jobs, such as FDH and South Asian construction workers. Although the view that ethnic minorities tend to be socioeconomically less privileged cannot be generalized because of the presence of foreign, more financially able, expatriates in the labor market, what tends to surface is the speculation on ethnic minorities' inability to contribute to Hong Kong's prosperity, which turns out to be an aspect deviating from Hong Kong's racial norms. The low socioeconomic status of certain families within ethnic minority groups who rely on social welfare attract negative stereotypes and may be seen as lazy by some local Chinese people (Chan 2013). Put differently, such a racial norm arises from a cultural expectation to contribute to Hong Kong's economic development and not hoarding the resources of the residents. This cultural expectation makes plausible an assumption on why

ethnic minorities from well-to-do backgrounds, such as Caucasians, Japanese, and Koreans, tend to be less racially denigrated compared to South or Southeast Asian residents.

The normativity described above reflects attitudes that homogenize ethnic minorities not just in terms of racial characteristics but also socioeconomic status. These attitudes run counter to the fact that each ethnic minority group within Hong Kong is heterogenous in terms of class, partly hinging on how they are treated differently. Such treatment points to the importance of empirically examining how racial discourses intersect with issues of class, gender, and religion within the city. This intersection of discourses is an area worthy of investigation beyond this chapter.

6 From Unresolved Tensions to Racial Formation: What Can Be Done?

By witnessing how Hong Kong grapples with what “multicultural” means in a context without broader mechanisms promoting such, it seems unsurprising that the treatment on ethnic minorities policy-wise has often resorted to addressing their immediate welfare, schooling, and language needs. This treatment, in parallel, often amounts to apathy in recognizing how racial differences are implicitly drawn at systemic levels, which ties in with the lack of long-term vision for the education of ethnic minorities. In this context, we extend the literature by conceptually interrogating Hong Kong's racialized discourse to offer clearer clues on the shaping of racial boundaries stemming from the presence of ethnic minorities. We began this chapter by asking: How are ethnic minorities racialized in Hong Kong? Our response is that the racialization of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong cannot be reduced to how they are made invisible at different levels, but also how they are alienated through the racial normativity in the dominant Chinese context of Hong Kong. These discourses together, whether tangible or not, act as powerful social forces that continue to accentuate differences between Chinese and ethnic minority people. Recognizing this premise is an important step in overcoming myopic conceptions of race as a “physical reality” based on appearance like skin color (Silva 2015, p. 84). Thus, to appreciate race as a social concept in Hong Kong, the analytical treatment of such must not be confined to primordial arguments that view racial identities as fixed and immutable (Cornell and Hartman 1998). Equally important here is how social meanings of race are dynamically defined, underpinning the portrayals on ethnic minorities at different discourse levels. The interrelation of how racialization plays out *across* these discourse levels must also be investigated rather than examining each in isolation to understand their impact on the social life of ethnic minorities more fully. Doing so would pave way for conceptualizing Hong Kong's racial formation, consistent with a pluralistic outlook that values social resilience as a strength and fabric of an international city (Kennedy 2012). This conceptualization would be an ambitious intellectual undertaking, if not a radical shift in epistemology, but nevertheless must be pursued to allow for proactive responses to the effects of

invisibility and racial normativity that render the experiences of ethnic minorities unheeded or misunderstood.

We argue that paying attention to the construction of racial differences at different levels paves way for reorienting inquiries and perceptions on race and its connection with how Hong Kong incarnates its notion of cultural diversity. The attention to the social dimension of race in understanding the diverse population of Hong Kong can drive our efforts in promoting cultural inclusivity in the education sector and beyond. To answer the “what can be done” question, we cannot help but critically reflect on the *doing* part, that is, our research practice. We recognize that our writings on ethnic minorities can be less than far-reaching in terms of readership as they generally can only be accessed via academic institutions, social networks, or channels. This is more so to the discontent of practitioners who work closely and regularly with ethnic minorities and who may regard academics as interested primarily in “theory-building” (Wong 2013, July), which can be thought to carry little implication for practice that directly improves the situation of ethnic minorities. As educators and advocates, however, we feel that these sentiments need not cripple our research efforts; rather, we are compelled to vouch for empirical methods that go beyond traditional surveys and interviews. This methodological orientation involves, for example, using participatory art-based and visual methods such as cellphilms (cellphone + video production; see MacEntee et al. 2016; Burkholder 2017) that can systematically and rigorously capture the richness, interstices, and idiosyncrasies of the social world of ethnic minorities. Taking advantage of such methods means that data or media produced from which can be easily used for participant engagement and public dissemination and, where relevant, to inform curriculum development. Participatory methods, thus, take on significance when the genuine goal to uncover the lifeworld of ethnic minorities is embedded in long-term research agendas. These methods also encourage thoughtful actions among those who are involved in producing data, where visibility takes place. Research, after all, is an educational activity that goes hand in hand with expanding our knowledge base to improve practice. We as authors are not free from the tensions of Hong Kong’s racialized discourses. But in trying to extricate ourselves from these tensions by writing this chapter, the more we come to grips with such tensioned discourses as a necessary and productive stimulation in promoting education about the city’s evolving forms of racialization.

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