

Lack of opportunity costs minorities

There was no better day than October 10 for weddings as it fell on the 10th month of the 10th year of the 21st century (10/10/10) and gels well with the Chinese maxim: a perfect 10.

It was also the day of the Hikathon organized by **Hong Kong Unison**, a registered charity specializing in helping, supporting and nurturing ethnic minorities, especially the young.

The Hikathon raised funds for **Unison**, which receives very little in subsidies from either the government or organizations.

The event was held in the Bride's Pool area, within the Pat Sin Leng Country Park, and attracted around 200 walkers and hikers. Also present were Lam Woon-kwong, chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and Emily Lau Wai-hing of the Democratic Party to show by example the need to "love your neighbor" whatever their color, creed or language.

By and large the event was well managed, with a good mix of local Chinese and non-Chinese sharing the stage, showing unity and singing as one.

I was glad to meet a Chinese police officer who was a volunteer helping out with the program. The event further highlighted the need for the government and society to show **Hong Kong** as a "world city" not just in name, which I feel it is at present.

While during the colonial days there were many ethnic-minority members working in senior positions within the government - and providing dedicated service - it is now rare to find a non-Chinese person in high office. Anyone still working is pending retirement or will most likely not have their contracts renewed when it suits the administration.

Recently, before the Hikathon, I was at the **Unison** office in Tai Kok Tsui to give ethnic-minority youths tips on how to become a police constable. All of them were **Hong Kong** born and bred, something I cannot boast. They can speak Cantonese well, a few spoke like a "native," but alas only very few knew how to read and write very basic characters.

Their reason was the lack of opportunities to learn and practice the Chinese language.

All of them were genuine in their desire to serve as police officers. They all said they could make a contribution toward bridging the cultural gap between the Chinese and ethnic minorities, and that they all have **Hong Kong** blood even if they do not have Chinese ink!

Truth hurts. I told them the truth, which is they must pass a Chinese examination in reading and writing, something which even I doubt I can do given my ability. My advice is to keep pressing the government to create an opportunity for them to enter government service. In the meantime they should equip themselves as best they can; to keep dreaming their dream.

Hong Kong's strength was its open embrace of anyone who wanted a place of refuge. Those who took refuge here were offered opportunities, despite a degree of racial discrimination, to climb the ladder of success, notwithstanding an absence of laws to outlaw discrimination.

Now even with a law to criminalize racial discrimination, those old-time opportunities no longer exist. What went wrong? JS Lam served with **Hong Kong** police - 'Asia's Finest' - for 32 years, reaching the rank of senior superintendent before retiring in 1996.

editor@thestandard.com.hk

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