



**Total number of document(s): 1**

---

1 .South China Morning Post | 2015-08-17  
Newspaper | CITY1 | CITY | education | By Shirley Zhao

---

## **STUDENTS FORCED OUT BY LANGUAGE BARRIER**

In the first of a 3-part series on ethnic-minority students, we look at why more now opt for university places on mainland and in Taiwan

Hongkongers who don't speak Chinese are increasingly looking to the mainland and Taiwan for post-secondary studies as they face difficulties in picking up the language – in which they must achieve minimum grades before joining the tough fight for a place at a local university.

Caritas Tuen Mun Marden Foundation Secondary School saw its first batch of nine non-Chinese-speaking applicants to mainland universities this year, adding to a stable cohort of five to eight pupils from Delia Memorial School (Hip Wo) in Kwun Tong that has been heading for tertiary education in Taiwan since 2012.

Educators and minority groups worry that Hong Kong, by ignoring the needs of these youngsters, may be losing talent at a time when industry demand for non-Chinese-speaking employees is on the rise.

“Non-Chinese-speaking students may have been driven out because university admission requirements ... have been unfair to them,” said Professor Chou Kee-lee, head of the Institute of Education's department of Asian and policy studies. “This is a loss to Hong Kong. We are facing an ageing society, but the number of ethnic-minority people has been rising. If they all go to other places for university studies and don't come back, this is a loss of important talent.”

Four out of the nine Marden pupils received offers from mainland universities, but three decided to stay in Hong Kong, while five out of the eight Delia pupils will go to Taiwanese universities.

The ethnic-minority population expanded by 31 per cent from 343,950 residents in 2001 to 451,183 in 2011, according to the 2011 census report. But the school attendance rate for ethnic minorities aged 19 to 24 was 32.8 per cent in 2011, lower than the 43.8 per cent across the population.

Come September, Marden graduate Cindy Poon will start English studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University – one of the mainland's top tertiary education institutions – after she was rejected by Hong Kong's Baptist and Polytechnic universities.

Born in Fiji to Chinese parents, Poon came to the city in 2012 at age 16 without knowing any Chinese. She got a top score of 5 in English at the Diploma of Secondary Education examinations this year, 3 in liberal studies, 2 in maths and 4 in both electives.

The minimum needed for university entry is 3 in Chinese and English, 2 in maths and liberal studies, and 2 in at least one elective.

Poon did not take Chinese at DSE level, instead opting for the alternative General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) for Chinese assessment, in which she scored the highest grade, A\*.

Local universities generally require at least an E or C from students submitting alternative Chinese qualifications.

Her scores should have qualified her for local university studies, but offers came only from the Open University and the Vocational Training Council.

“The Chinese language is a huge disadvantage for us,” Poon said. “When teachers from some universities came to our school ... most of our concern was about [the acceptability of] GCSE. And they always told us they would look at it case by case ... or that they were not sure.”

Most ethnic-minority pupils took Chinese exams under the GCSE or General Certificate of Education (GCE) because, for them, DSE-level Chinese was too difficult, said Holing Yip Ho-ling, research officer at minority advocacy group *Unison*.

The group has been lobbying for a comprehensive curriculum of Chinese as a second language for these pupils.

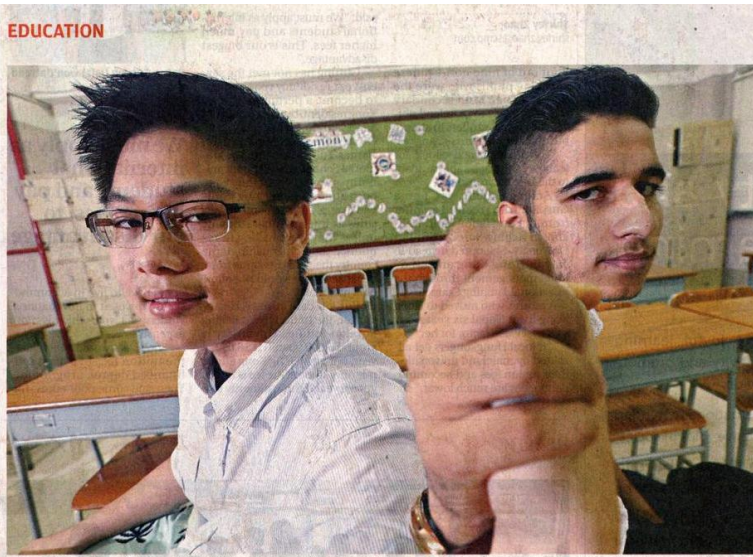
The government unveiled its long-awaited framework on this issue last year, but without guidelines on the level of Chinese these pupils should acquire, Yip said. She said the framework also lacked a corresponding Chinese qualification exam acceptable by all local tertiary institutions.

Gama Febrian Ahimsa, from Delia, is caught in a similar dilemma as Poon. Despite fulfilling admission requirements, he could not secure a place at PolyU or City University – so he will join Ming Chuan University in Taipei in September to study computing.

Competition for local universities is stiff, with only 17,609 places open for the 24,547 people who obtained the minimum DSE scores for entry this year.

Meanwhile, industry demand is not met. Marden principal Yuen Kwok-ming said he heard from people at nursing homes, schools and law firms that they needed to hire minority staff to cope with a growing number of clients with similar backgrounds.

DECLINED OFFERS C2



Gama Febrian Ahimsa (left) and Mahroof Hussain, who left Delia in 2012 and now studies at Taiwan's I-Shou University. Photo: David Wong

# STUDENTS FORCED OUT BY LANGUAGE BARRIER

In the first of a 3-part series on ethnic-minority students, we look at why more now opt for university places on mainland and in Taiwan

Shirley Zhao  
shirley.zhao@scmp.com

Hongkongers who don't speak Chinese are increasingly looking to the mainland and Taiwan for post-secondary studies as they face difficulties in picking up the language – in which they must achieve minimum grades before joining the tough fight for a place at a local university.

Caritas Tuen Mun Marden Foundation Secondary School saw its first batch of nine non-Chinese-speaking applicants to mainland universities this year, adding to a stable cohort of five to eight pupils from Delia Memorial School (Hip Wo) in Kwun Tong that has been heading for tertiary education in Taiwan since 2012.

Educators and minority groups worry that Hong Kong, by ignoring the needs of these youngsters, may be losing talent at a time when industry demand for non-Chinese-speaking employees is on the rise.

"Non-Chinese-speaking students may have been driven out because university admission requirements... have been unfair to them," said Professor Chou Kee-lee, head of the Institute of Education's department of Asian and policy studies. "This is a loss to

Hong Kong. We are facing an ageing society, but the number of ethnic-minority people has been rising. If they all go to other places for university studies and don't come back, this is a loss of important talent."

Four out of the nine Marden pupils received offers from mainland universities, but three decided to stay in Hong Kong, while five out of the eight Delia pupils will go to Taiwanese universities.

The ethnic-minority population expanded by 31 per cent from 343,950 residents in 2001 to 451,183 in 2011, according to the 2011 census report. But the school attendance rate for ethnic minorities aged 19 to 24 was 32.8 per cent in 2011, lower than the 43.8 per cent across the population.

Come September, Marden graduate Cindy Poon will start English studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University – one of the mainland's top tertiary education institutions – after she was rejected by Hong Kong's Baptist and Polytechnic universities.

Born in Fiji to Chinese parents, Poon came to the city in 2012 at age 16 without knowing any Chinese. She got a top score of 5 in English at the Diploma of Secondary Education examinations this year, 3 in liberal studies, 2 in maths and 4 in both electives.

The minimum needed for university entry is 3 in Chinese and English, 2 in maths and liberal studies, and 2 in at least one elective.

Poon did not take Chinese at DSE level, instead opting for the alternative General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) for Chinese assessment, in which she scored the highest grade, 'A'.

Local universities generally require at least an E or C from students submitting alternative Chinese qualifications.



**If they all go to other places and don't come back, this is a loss of important talent**

PROFESSOR CHOU KEE-LEE

Her scores should have qualified her for local university studies, but offers came only from the Open University and the Vocational Training Council.

"The Chinese language is a huge disadvantage for us," Poon said. "When teachers from some universities came to our school... most of our concern was about [the acceptability of] GCSE. And they always told us they would look at it case by case... or that they were not sure."

Most ethnic-minority pupils took Chinese exams under the GCSE or General Certificate of Education (GCE) because, for them, DSE-level Chinese was too difficult, said Holing Yip Ho-ling, research officer at minority advocacy group Unison.

The group has been lobbying for a comprehensive curriculum of Chinese as a second language for these pupils.

The government unveiled its long-awaited framework on this issue last year, but without guidelines on the level of Chinese these pupils should acquire, Yip said. She said the framework also lacked a corresponding Chinese qualification exam acceptable by all local tertiary institutions.

Gama Febrian Ahimsa, from Delia, is caught in a similar dilemma as Poon. Despite fulfilling admission requirements, he could not secure a place at PolyU or City University – so he will join Ming Chuan University in Taipei in September to study computing.

Competition for local universities is stiff, with only 17,609 places open for the 24,547 people who obtained the minimum DSE scores for entry this year.

Meanwhile, industry demand is not met. Marden principal Yuen Kwok-ming said he heard from people at nursing homes, schools and law firms that they needed to hire minority staff to cope with a growing number of clients with similar backgrounds.

> DECLINED OFFERS C2

DOCUMENT ID: 201508175312893

Source: Wisers electronic service. This content, the trademarks and logos belong to Wisers, the relevant organizations or copyright owners. All rights reserved. Any content provided by user is the responsibility of the user and Wisers is not responsible for such content, copyright clearance or any damage/loss suffered as a result.