

Plans for compulsory Chinese History need to consider needs of students who are not Chinese

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According to Chief Executive Carrie Lam's 2017 Policy Address, the Education Bureau (EDB) will include Chinese History as an independent compulsory subject for the junior secondary level in the 2018/19 school year to promote students' understanding of Chinese history and culture.

The EDB is conducting the Second Stage of Consultation with the education sector on the revised Chinese History Curriculum (Secondary 1-3) between Oct 30 and Nov 30. Has the EDB considered the needs of ethnic minority students who are also Hongkongers in terms of the teaching language and curriculum content?



Photo: GovHK.

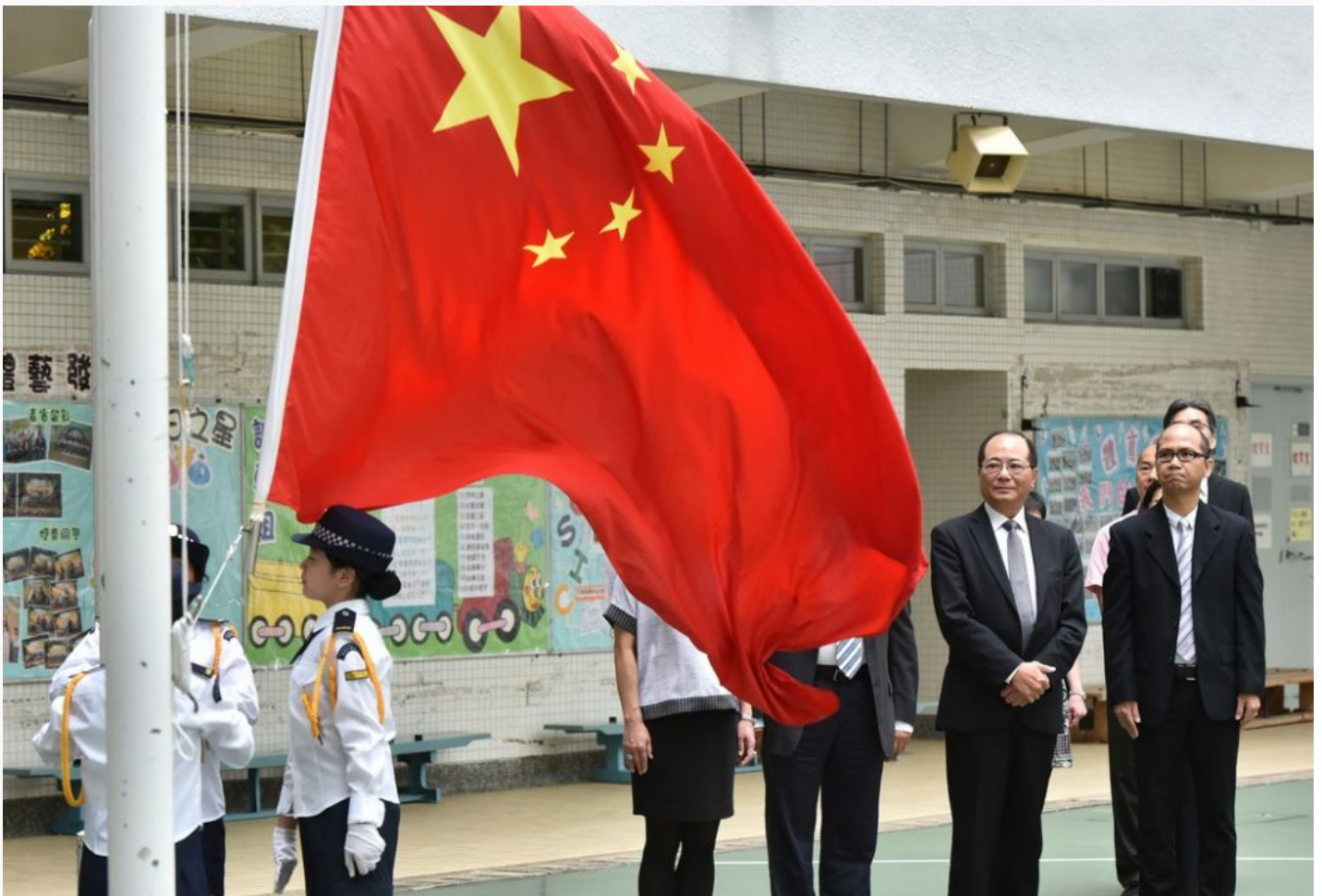
Currently, Chinese History is largely taught in Chinese in junior secondary forms. For ethnic minorities, apart from grappling with the content of the subject, they face the added struggle of the language of instruction.

Official education policy assumes all students speak Chinese as their mother tongue, and for the last 20 years there has been no Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) curriculum to help non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students acquire adequate Chinese skills.

Although a CSL Learning Framework was introduced in 2014, its effectiveness remains to be seen. The EDB has said little about support for NCS students in subjects taught in Chinese other than the Chinese Language subject; Chinese History is no exception.

At present, some schools may allow NCS students to study Chinese History in English, or simplify certain contents for them. If Chinese History becomes a compulsory subject, would schools be less inclined to make arrangements for NCS students because they have to conform to requirements under school-based assessment?

The consultation paper mentioned that the amended curriculum can “cater to diverse student needs” – but can it cater to NCS students who may not have good Chinese language skills?



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The Curriculum mentioned that the subject “emphasizes comprehension not memorization”; but in an exam-oriented atmosphere, NCS students can only hope to pass exams by rote learning. Does this meet EDB’s goals set out in the consultation paper that Chinese History subject nurtures students’ “abilities to analyse and critique historical events” and allows students to “build up historical knowledge and understand the present by studying the past”?

Since ethnic minority students are and will be facing difficulties learning the subject such that they will not benefit as much from the lessons as their Chinese peers, the EDB needs to address this issue with concrete and workable solutions.

Many ethnic minorities have been in Hong Kong for generations and see Hong Kong as their home; it is not unreasonable that they learn the history of the country they are residing in.

As early as the Tang Dynasty 1100 years ago, there were ethnic minorities living in the Canton area. During Hong Kong’s colonial period, people of different ethnicities came to Hong Kong to serve in the government or to trade. They eventually settled here and made many contributions.

Ethnic minorities have been an integral part of Hong Kong’s history since the very beginning. About 2,700 Indian soldiers and four Indian businessmen landed on Hong Kong Island with the British in 1841; Indian and Nepalese soldiers fought bravely during the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong.



Photo: GovHK.

The EDB should include ethnic minorities' history under the topic of "the development of Hong Kong"; not only can this increase ethnic minority students' motivation to learn and their sense of belonging, this can also allow Chinese students to have a better understanding of our local ethnic diversity.

The consultation paper mentioned that in the extended parts, teachers can arrange different learning activities such as exchange tours to the Mainland to promote students' interest in the subject; however, ethnic minorities may not be able to participate equally in such tours.

Ethnic minorities who are born and raised here do not automatically become Chinese citizens, so they have to apply for a China visa holding a foreign passport if they wish to visit the Mainland. This may prevent ethnic minorities from taking part in such school activities.

From the Mother Tongue Policy to the policy of "Using Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject", ethnic minorities' learning needs are overlooked in policy formulation.

The EDB should carefully consider the impact of making Chinese History subject a compulsory subject for students with diverse learning needs, including ethnic minorities, in terms of the execution of the policy and the curriculum content.

Ethnic minority students should not be left to struggle by themselves; the EDB should close the achievement gap between Chinese and ethnic minority students so that all students enjoy equal right to education.

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Comments