

Explore discrimination through language, curriculum and Cross-border schooling on mainland students within Hong Kong secondary education

Introduction

The complicated relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland has continued to cause social controversy after China regained sovereignty over Hong Kong. After a century of colonial history and cultural coverage, Hong Kong inhabitants' views, lifestyles, and educational systems have all been influenced to some extent. This essay focuses on various issues caused by identity differences between Hong Kong and mainland students, and discusses the discrimination and isolation faced by mainland students (mainly Shenzhen-Hong Kong cross-border students) studying in Hong Kong. The cross-border students in this paper shall be referred to as CBS throughout the text that follows for reading convenience. It will first analyze the reasons for the dual identity formed after Hong Kong's return to China's management system from a social and cultural perspective, and then discuss the impact of the reshaping of the education system on students' sense of identity, including the discrimination caused by identity disparities between Hong Kong and mainland students. Critically analyze the challenges and difficulties encountered by Cross-border students in the secondary education environment in Hong Kong. In order to better understand how differences in identity cause mainland students to face different forms of challenges in Hong Kong's secondary education environment, It focuses on investigating the underlying reasons why mainland students are unable to fully integrate into Hong Kong social groups from three perspectives: discrimination based on language (mainly on putonghua, and is used interchangeably with putonghua), liberal studies curriculum, and cross-border school administration practices. Critically evaluate about how identity differences lead to, but are not limited to CBS and the others experienced marginalization in secondary education in Hong Kong.

Background information

1.Identity reconstruction

According to information provided by Kuah-Pearce and Fong (2010), in the post-colonial era, educational reform was also one of the key changes

experienced by Hong Kong after its return. Due to their different educational experiences from mainland students, some students prefer to put their identity as the 'HongKongers'.

April (2018) believes that the explanation of identity comes from how individuals understand their relationship with society, emphasizing that self-identity is formed by self-feeling. After successfully resuming its sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, China established the 'Hong Kong Special Administrative Region' and the 'one country, two systems' social system, which means it has kept the original capitalist system that was put in place during the colonial era. Although Hong Kong and the Mainland have an inseparable economic and political relationship, there are always conflicts in terms of culture (Leung, Waters and Ki 2021). From a macro perspective, people in Hong Kong and mainland share the same identity. Leung, Waters and Ki (2021), however, examined Hong Kong residents' sense of identity from social, political, and cultural angles and discovered that one of the causes of identity conflict is opposition to or appreciation of Chinese culture. Due to the impact of capitalism and colonialism, it simultaneously evolved into a contemporary metropolis ahead of the mainland, creating its own distinct culture. Identification and antipathy to Chinese culture coexisted after repatriation to China, making it challenging for Hong Kong residents to fully renounce their identification as 'Hong Kongers'.

2. Cross-border and local Hong Kong students

However, while retaining some of its educational ideas and Western culture coverage, Hong Kong education also attracts a large number of students from the mainland to study in Hong Kong. Because its education is more international and maintains some autonomy, education has produced diversity, and the ability to receive more English resources than the mainland is also one of the factors for the increase in student mobility. The most prominent group is the CBS: those who born and study in Hong Kong but live in mainland China. By 2020, more than 20,000 young people from Shenzhen (one of the cities in mainland) will cross the city boundaries to study in Hong Kong every day (Leung, Waters and Ki, 2021). In contrast to obtain the high quality of education resources, traveling to and from the border for education is very time consuming. Similar discussions on the learning experience of CBS were carried out in the studies of Yuen and Wu (2011), Wu and Jordan (2020) as well as Leung, Waters and Ki (2021). In an attempt to better fit into Hong Kong's educational system, mainland students commute to class; yet, because they are not fluent in Cantonese, they feel alienated and alone on campus. There are various things that have impacted CBS's identity. Wu (2020) suggested that cultural and social capital have a close relationship with identity disparities such as relationships between students and their parents or cultural background that students obtain. Despite residing in mainland China, CBS is more like to believe they are from Hong Kong because to their

familial background and connections with relatives.

According to Yuen (2015), education in Hong Kong follows an assimilation process. When CBS study in Hong Kong, they have to adjust to studying Cantonese and English, which progressively erodes their Mandarin-speaking habit and causes them to embrace the new culture without resisting it. Nonetheless, Yuen's research did note that the likelihood of discriminating decreased with increasing assimilation. Even so, local Hong Kong students continue to make fun of mainland students for being 'mainland people', despite their best efforts to integrate into Hong Kong and Chinese identities. Local students deliberately treat CBS separately from them. Even when the CBS group was in mainland China, they were jokingly called 'Hong Kongers' in the mainland because of their legal Hong Kong status. In their most recent work, Leung and Waters (2022) go into additional detail about this circumstance, stated that allowing CBS to completely integrate into the Hong Kong educational system is the ultimate goal of child education for the government, schools, and parents in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the CBS don't always have the opportunity to participate in the extracurricular activities after school due to long daily commute. This situation further hinders their ability to fully integrate with their Hong Kong classmates, as well as the Hong Kong education system (Hue, 2008).

Language bias among mainland students

The Biliteracy and Trilingual policy is an education policy implemented since Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region in 1997. This policy requires students to be able to use English and Chinese in writing and reading; and to master English, Cantonese and Mandarin in speaking (Li, 2022). Lai (2001) found an interesting result from the language preferences of Hong Kong middle school students: when students from different social status choose language preferences, whether they prefer three languages or two languages, English will definitely appear in one of the language preferences. Students say that mastering English allows them to better understand international cultures. On the contrary, speaking fluent putonghua brings no benefits and is meaningless. According to information from Lai (2005), before Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule, nearly 90% of secondary schools in Hong Kong used English as the main language of instruction. English, as one of the cultural legacies left over from the colonial period, plays a very important role in Hong Kong's education system. After Hong Kong became a special administrative region, the government began to promote multilingual education and popularize Mandarin learning. But things backfired, and students became resistant to Mandarin. Interviews with Hong Kong middle school students who spoke English, Cantonese and Mandarin found that English was the most popular language, followed by Cantonese and then

Mandarin. Some students also stated that choosing to speak Cantonese would enhance their identity as Hong Kongers, but that speaking Chinese would do nothing other than help them feel a little patriotic (Lai, 2005).

The dialect spoken by most of the CBS group from Shenzhen is Cantonese, which supposed to be same with that of Hong Kong. However, local students in Hong Kong believe that Cantonese in Hong Kong and Cantonese in the mainland are not exactly the same (Cheung and Leung, 2009). Since Cantonese in Hong Kong was influenced by Western culture during the colonial period, it formed its own unique way of expression locally, which brought challenges and some experiences of discrimination to mainland students. Cheung and Leung (2009) mentioned in their research that the inconsistency between capitalism and socialism led to the formation of separate cultures in Hong Kong and mainland China. The status of CBS or mainland immigrant groups as outsiders has led to discrimination against these groups by Hong Kong locals. Over thirty percent of mainland students who had studied in Hong Kong for less than two years reported that local students are more accustomed to communicating in Cantonese and English in their spare time. Therefore, the inability to speak fluent Cantonese hinders most CBS from integrating into the social circle of local students. This was further explained in the study of Gu (2011), mainland students studying in Hong Kong have built their own cultural community, a 'refuge' when they suffer from prejudice in speaking putonghua. This cause the further isolating interaction with local students. Apart from this, CBS also faces many problems in English learning. Most CBS or mainland immigrant students only receive all-English or half-English instruction when they entire the secondary school in Hong Kong, this thereby cause them lag far behind the English learning progress of local Hong Kong students. Chatteries Educational Foundations(2021) reported on the English learning situation of CBS: a 16-year-old CBS was often trapped in the 13-year-old class because of his poor English grades. This not only slowed down his own learning progress, but also made him 'make a fool of himself' among the lower-grade children, resulting in a feeling of being unable to integrate and marginalized. More importantly, a survey conducted by Sun (2021) on 195 mainland immigrants showed that the probability of feeling discriminated against by classmates is more than 20%; the proportion of students who choose to hide their immigrant status to avoid being discriminated against is as high as 40%. "As soon as you open your mouth, you will be told that you must be a mainlander" - In addition to being a student, Mr. Wei, who has lived in Hong Kong for 16 years, was also reminded of his mainland accent.

Further more, in the study by Li and Xiao (2020) discussed about teachers in some Hong Kong secondary schools have begun to prohibit students from speaking Mandarin outside of compulsory Chinese classes. Principal Jv said that many children do not have any foundation in putonghua, and when their parents only have a Cantonese background, it seems like a mandatory and

meaningless requirement for them to learn putonghua. Teacher groups also avoid using Mandarin to communicate with each other, and even laugh at Mandarin without considering it as disrespectful behavior. From a teacher's perspective, Jv was offended many times because she spoke Mandarin. In addition to Jv, there are three other university teachers who also suffered discrimination inside and outside the school because of their Mandarin speaking, which even escalated to violence in severe cases. It can be seen that from students to teachers, whether they can pronounce Cantonese or speak Mandarin, they are all discriminated against.

It can be seen from these examples that in schools, English and Cantonese are regarded as high-level languages, while putonghua is increasingly looked down upon. Both those who are not fluent in pronunciation of Cantonese and those who are fluent in Mandarin are subject to microaggressions or violence.

Liberal studies, the cause of discrimination?

While reading most of the discussions about discrimination against CBS, I started thinking about the group that was the target of the discrimination—Hong Kong students—because the majority of the literature addresses the problem of discrimination from the standpoint of CBS. When I inquired about the reasons why Hong Kong students are discriminated against, I found that the general education courses in Hong Kong secondary education are closely related to the discriminatory psychology of Hong Kong students. Between 2009 and 2012, Hong Kong's liberal studies curriculum underwent two phases of reform. The Education Bureau has not standardized the textbooks for liberal studies, despite the fact that it is one of the compulsory courses for secondary school pupils in Hong Kong (Lee and Wu, 2020). As a symbol of authority and representation, textbooks play a vital role in the transmission of information (Jackson, 2017). In 2012, liberal studies was renamed 'Moral and National Education'. The new proposal immediately met with much opposition among students. Koon (2022) highlighted the ten-day protest by Hong Kong secondary school students in 2012 against the Hong Kong government and Education Bureau's proposed moral education and national education curriculum, which students believed to have led to 'blind patriotism' due to its extensive indoctrination into mainland culture, history, and politics. Li and Wu (2022) found that the stigmatizing descriptions of mainland China in textbooks directly led to students' anti-China sentiments. This negative attitude obviously goes against the original intention of general education, which is to allow students to better understand and appreciate the cultural knowledge gap in mainland China. After reviewing and summarizing all general education textbooks, Jackson et al. (2017) found that most textbooks describe cultural diversity in general terms without detailed explanations, which results in students' basic awareness of multiculturalism.

This finding is consistent with the research of Li and Wu (2022), who believe that the biased content contained in textbooks increases the stereotypes of Hong Kong's younger generation towards the Mainland students and people. They further pointed out that in addition to criticizing the biased views of mainland lifestyles in textbooks, the order of the content is also one of the reasons that affects students' understanding. In addition, the definition of identity in the book also leaves a very vague concept or directly conveys the rejection of Chinese identity and reinforces the Hong Kong identity influenced by Westernized culture. It is not difficult to see that the information conveyed in the textbooks reflects the profound impact of a century of colonial culture and ideology on Hong Kong. In the first part about the example of discrimination against mainland students speaking putonghua, part of study mentioned that the indifference and disrespect towards putonghua is due to the discrimination against mainland identity. Through the discussion of liberal studies, it was found that the reason why students have a repulsive attitude toward language is actually because the education they received misguided mainland culture. Therefore, it is difficult for CBS to feel accepted in Hong Kong's educational environment.

Cross-border schooling

During the British colonial period, the boundary between Shenzhen and Hong Kong was originally used to control people travelling or wanting to emigrate from the mainland to Hong Kong, it is continued to enforce strict border policies after China took over Hong Kong's sovereignty (Nancy and Leung, 2012). Sun(2021) mentioned that after Hong Kong became a special administrative region, the border between Hong Kong and Shenzhen was still called the 'international' border. The subsequent popularity of cross-border education can be traced to the rise in marriage rates in Hong Kong and the mainland, as well as international recognition of Hong Kong education and the spread of multilingual teaching policies. According to the data provided by Waters and Leung (2021), the longest round-trip for cross border can be more than 4 hours. The entry process for CBS is very complicated, from special entry document preparation and strict entry system, which makes students who cross the border to attend school suffer a lot of stress. Although the government has specially created a special channel for the CBS to go to school, in order to help children get a more convenient and fast entry experience. However, behind the special channel for CBS students, there are also biased behaviors and security risks for them. For example, although the identity of these CBS legally belongs to Hong Kong, they can still only enter Hong Kong independently through the special channel without their parents. In the later study in 2022 by Waters and Leung mentioned that children face strict border checks every day, and camera surveillance has created a

psychological pressure on students. It is controversial for primary school students to take buses to school without parental supervision (Nancy and Leung, 2012). When entering the country, they must scan documents by themselves, face customs questioning, and occasionally encounter border agents who are refused entry because they entered the country alone as minors. The time lost on the trip also directly causes them to be unable to participate in extracurricular activities organized by the school in most cases, which greatly reduces the after-school contact opportunities with local children in Hong Kong, and indirectly causes them to feel isolated from the real integration into the classmate group. (Waters and Leung, 2020; Nancy and Leung, 2012). In addition to some objective factors that hinder mainland students from integrating into their classmates, subjective factors mentioned by Chan et al.,(2020) saying that the CBS are actually more willing to communicate with students of similar backgrounds, and limited interpersonal resources make them less willing to leave their own comfort zone.

Under the influence of the pandemic in early 2020, due to the policies of the mainland to control the epidemic, China presents a closed state to the outside world, resulting in the forced closure of the shenzhen-HongKong cross boundaries。 Most students therefore suspend and drop out of school;

Secondly, due to the strict regulation of the Internet implemented by the mainland, children stranded in the mainland during the epidemic period cannot access the same learning resources as their Hong Kong classmates, which further deepens the isolation of CBS among local HongKong students (Waters and Leung, 2023; Song et al.,2023).

Recommendations regarding three issues

While reflecting on the impact of colonialism and education on groups and assimilation, it is extremely important to consider the changes and appropriate recommendations that these negative social events need to face. According to Wu and Liu (2022), 76% of mainland students receive different education in Hong Kong, and finding a balance between English, Cantonese and Mandarin has become an issue that cannot be ignored. Schools and teacher groups should reduce prejudiced attitudes such as those mentioned in the example of Li and Xiao (2020) that prohibit students from speaking Mandarin outside of Chinese study time for personal reasons. In order to balance the use of different languages and achieve equality in multilingual environments, excessive praise or demeaning of any one of them should be reduced. To improve the teaching environment in Hong Kong which is biased and verbally aggressive towards native Mandarin learners.

Regarding the issue mentioned in the second part of Li and Wu (2020) that schools can choose any publishing house to teach the general education

curriculum, it is necessary for the Education Bureau to formulate unified and recognized textbooks and contents for the general education curriculum to reduce the monotony and confusion of concepts. Fung and Yip (2010) advocate that education bureaux, governments and schools should guide students to identify themselves with society, country and multiculturalism from a more inclusive and comprehensive perspective, instead of personal and insulting views. In addition, the training of teachers is not the only group that needs to be improved, more such as the selection of policy makers and other stakeholders should strive to make efforts for social equity and justice (Jackson, 2017).

Chan and Kabir's (2014) responses have implications for CBS and the time, effort, and safety issues caused by immigrant students traveling to and from Hong Kong. Although the Hong Kong government and Education Bureau are trying to consider ways to make it more convenient for CBS children to go to school, such as establishing schools based on the Hong Kong curriculum in Shenzhen or Fujian province, this measure is far from enough compared to dozens of countries. Thousands of students travel to Hong Kong for school every week. However, the Hong Kong government has also proposed that local non-governmental organizations provide personalized and diversified curriculum services for CBS; Some parent conferences have also been held in Shenzhen to reduce the stress on parents and children on the road.

Conclusion

This essay explores the negative impact of differences in identity between two different groups (Hong Kong and mainland students) on language discrimination, liberal studies curriculum, and cross-border education schooling mechanisms. The relationship between these issues and the sense of identity of mainland and Hong Kong students is critically considered. It first analyzes the language challenges and prejudices faced by mainland students in secondary education in Hong Kong. Under the influence of colonialism, English has inevitably become the most popular language in Hong Kong. The Bilingual and Trilingual policy has played an important role in the study of putonghua. However, due to a lack of understanding of the mainland's cultural background, Mandarin learning is still not welcomed in the Hong Kong education system, and even teachers hold it in contempt. This further leads to the isolation of mainland students who are accustomed to speaking Mandarin and their inability to integrate into the local student population. It then explores the impact of liberal study course in Hong Kong secondary school students and considers whether this is a direct cause of discrimination among mainland students. Research shows that the imprecise and biased content in liberal study textbooks has given students wrong guidance and is one of the important reasons why they reject mainland culture. Finally, it discusses the complex and time-consuming path of cross-border studies for

CBS. The pressure they endure after entering the Hong Kong city, the lack of time to participate in extracurricular activities after school, and even the impact of the epidemic are gradually deepening the marginalization of cross-border students. Finally, to address or reduce the deeper effects of these biases and discrimination, several suggestions have been made through governments. For example additional training for teachers and policymakers; raise the multicultural awareness for students and parents can also help lead to better learning experiences for the CBS. While achieving cultural balance and identity bias will still take time, everyone from students to government has a responsibility to make the effort to reduce the misunderstanding of CBS and other mainland students.

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