



China's Business Newspaper

---

## Language difficulties spell trouble for ethnic minorities

**Nearly 90 percent of ethnic minorities say they encounter difficulties learning Cantonese, with many also handicapped in education and employment, according to a survey by the New Home Association.**

Joey Hung

*Thursday, July 30, 2015*

Nearly 90 percent of ethnic minorities say they encounter difficulties learning Cantonese, with many also handicapped in education and employment, according to a survey by the New Home Association.

The nongovernmental organization found although 95 percent of the 1,800 respondents considered Hong Kong their home, their lives are at a disadvantage.

About 88 percent said learning Cantonese is difficult as there are limited opportunities to practice, not enough language support, and they struggle with the absence of an alphabet.

"From the survey result, there are only around 20 percent of them choosing Chinese as their second language," Chinese University of Hong Kong adjunct assistant professor in anthropology Wyman Tang Wai-man said. Apart from these, 60 percent of respondents believe their proficiency in Cantonese is only elementary.

The survey was conducted in two periods from January to November in 2013 and 2014 by Home Centre, a regional office of the association, and analyzed by CUHK.

Ahtsham Hafiz, a Pakistani, said he has encountered discrimination owing to his race.

"We have less job opportunities. Shopkeepers also just ignore us when we want to buy things," the 18-year-old said.

Hafiz studied at a local school but he was put in the ethnic minorities class, which he said lowered his chances of practicing Cantonese. He also said the language is hard to master even though he was born and raised in Hong Kong.

Only 3.2 percent of respondents completed an undergraduate degree in Hong Kong or overseas.

Centennial College assistant professor Mario Liong Chan-ching said it is difficult for ethnic minorities to gain a tertiary-level qualification without proficient Cantonese.

"They would also like to move up in society, but language and their own culture make it challenging," Liong said.

The unemployment rate among respondents at 7.2 percent was more than double the rate for the general public during the same period.

"The government is the largest employer in Hong Kong ... I hope that they will adjust the level of Chinese to increase the job opportunities for them," New Home Association head of service (Hong Kong) Chan Yee-fai said.