

Diversity and Inclusion in Hong Kong Workplace focusing on the Education Industry

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Introduction/ Methodology

The article is mostly based on theoretical research and discusses the main theories connected to diversity and inclusion in China, focusing on workplaces in Hong Kong in the industry of education.

We have used 4 interviews (2 women, and 2 men) who works or have worked in the industry of education in China.

The keywords: Inclusive society, Diversity; People with a disability; LGBTQ society; Gender stereotypes; Education problems.

China is the largest developing country in the world and has more than 1,4 billion of population. Administratively, China is divided into 23 provinces, 5 autonomous, 4 municipalities and 2 Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong, Macao). Mainland China is also classified into different geographic areas, specifically eastern, central and western regions (UNICEF). The main challenges to the country are connected to economical situations. Economically, China is one of the leading in the world. In the report of UNICEF is mentioned, that economic and human development indicators are lower in the western region, compared to the eastern region (UNICEF).

The country itself is diverse, which means that except economic situation, China has a lot of challenges connected to social norms, diversity and inclusion. The definition of diversity includes differences in personal, social, and even thinking styles. It can be visible dimensions like physical aspects, age, ethnicity, or invisible influences such as culture, religion, education and sexual orientation. Inclusion puts the concept and practice of diversity into action by creating an environment of involvement, respect, and connection - where the richness of ideas, backgrounds or cultures and perspectives are accepted, welcomed, equally treated and valued (Zhang, 2021, p. 9).

But, in some researchers' opinions, in China diversity issues are not noted as top challenges. It may be that in fact diversity is not an issue in attracting and retaining talent in China or it may be that there is simply not sufficient understanding of diversity (Nathwani et.al., p.20).

In the financial sector, "diversity" often refers to having staff or customers with different dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, social background and physical or mental ability, while "inclusion" means valuing and accepting people for who they are and providing them with equal and fair opportunities. Diversity and inclusion can be considered internally in a financial institution in terms of the composition of its board of directors, management and staff members, or externally in terms of its dealings with customers and the public. One of the main focuses of diversity has been on gender, but the scope is expanding to cover other diversity dimensions, including age, disability, race and ethnicity (Nompumelelo & Jeffery 2022 p.4).

Under China Mainland law, employees should enjoy the right to be employed on an equal basis under the law. Employees should not be subject to any discrimination arising from differences in terms of nationality, race, gender and religious belief. Schrader Anke makes a brief review of Chinese (mainland) law connected to diversity ad mentions, that From the rights to equal employment opportunities in particular are covered in the Chinese Constitution, the Labor Law, the Law on the Promotion of Employment, the Law on the Protection of Disabled Persons, the Regulation on Employment of Persons with Disabilities, as well as additional laws and regulations ensuring equal access to education, training, and economic assistance programs related to employment. As a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, China has also taken an internationally binding pledge to implement and enforce legislation that protects equal rights to employment and eradicates discrimination of any kind in the pursuit of work and career advancement (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.7).

The labour law of China doesn't separate gender and clarifies that women should enjoy equal employment rights to men. When companies are recruiting employees, women should not be refused on the grounds of sex, nor should the recruitment standards for women be raised, except in those types of work or positions of work that are unsuitable for women as stipulated by the law. (Zhang, 2021, p.9)

One of the most interesting and important cities is Hong Kong, which is located in southern China. A place with a cross-exchange of Eastern and Western characteristics, as well as a mix of cultures, religions and ethnic groups existing side by side in a harmonious way. In the research "*Diversity in Education in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*", the author highlights the main and unique challenges to Hong Kong and says, that today they are related to diversity, as a special administrative region of China, operating under the "one country-two systems" principle as a semi-autonomous, liberal society within communist China. Modern diasporic movements of populations both across and within countries impact social diversity at multiple levels of scale, i.e., politics and teaching and learning issues from pre-primary to higher education (Bridges, et.al., p.2)

As one of the leading cities in China, Hong Kong is a perfect destination for the youth, students and every person, who is going to build a carrier. It makes the city diverse and very active. During the development of the technical industries, education system, enterprises and other kinds of profit and non-profit organizations, Hong Kong requires people for workplaces and the companies have a lot of challenges connected to make the atmosphere inclusive and diverse adapted to the citizens of the city.

From the vulnerable and even marginalized groups in Hong Kong, we can separate first of all people with disabilities. The research showed up, that living in China for them, as in many other developing and even developed countries, is full of challenges in every field. In Hong Kong lives 137,152 disabled persons, and in China, the number is more than 85 million. Schendler highlight the main factors of unemployment among persons with a disability in China: inadequate access to education and training in marketable labour skills, negative societal attitudes, prejudices and disinterest in workplaces and the overall labour market, and a lack of proactive enforcement of rights and funding of effective programs on the part of the government. (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.10).

In her opinion, they are marginalized due to stigma, discrimination, and a lack of successful government strategies. They are marginalised economically and socially, with limited access to education, training programs, and work opportunities. Even more discouraging from a sustainability viewpoint, regulatory protections rather than open market forces are responsible for the majority of jobs filled by persons with disabilities. (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.5).

Eric Zhang Guozhong in his article "*Inclusion of person with disability in China*" mentions, that China's constitution provides a general principle on the protection of people with disabilities. "*All citizens ... have the right to material assistance from the state and society when they are old, ill or disabled. The state develops the social insurance, social relief and medical and health services that are required to enable citizens to enjoy this right...*" and "*the state and society help make arrangements for the work, livelihood and education of the blind, deaf-mute and other handicapped citizens. In addition, more than thirty national laws contain specific provisions concerning people with disabilities and the protection of their rights, including Civil Law, Criminal Law, the Law of Education, Law on Higher Education, Labour Law and so on* (Guozhong, 2006).

One of the main challenges and problems for PWD in China is education and workplaces. Less education is the reason of poor social and economic lifestyles during their life. During the interviews, informants mentioned, that they have never worked with disabled persons. Despite that, Eric Zang mentions, that in China, the right to work is guaranteed by the Law, which states that, "*no discrimination shall be practised against disabled persons in employment, engagement, status regularisation, promotion, determining technical or professional titles, payroll for labour, welfare, labour insurance or in other aspects.*" Correspondingly, employers like state-run welfare enterprises should not deny people with disabilities employment (Guozhong, 2006).

"I believe, that the major difficulty for physically disabled persons is the lack of space in a crowded city like Hong Kong. As the overpopulation and very limited space, it is pretty hard for disabled persons, who might need help with tools or equipment like wheelchairs or sticks. And people surrounding them might find them occupying too much space, especially in very crowded subways or buses. The major problem is the lack of space generally in this city." (Kiki 27 years old, teacher from Hong Kong)

Diversity and inclusive society come from education. The first step, where the people can learn what means and why is important to live in an inclusive atmosphere, comes from the first years of school. So, education has one of the important roles in the future inclusivity of humanity.

The government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is promoting inclusion by encouraging all schools to accept children with special education needs through employing a whole-school approach (WSA) towards education (Forlin,& Sin p.9). The field of education is open to foreign teachers, who are ready to live and teach English languages in kindergarten and schools. Those teachers are spending a few years in China, mostly in rural areas.

One of our informants, who lived in China and taught in a primary school in a small town near Hong Kong (she doesn't mention the name of the school and town) with the program "Early Bird in China", mentioned:

"Living in China was full of challenges, I lived in a town where were not too many foreigners. People were very friendly to me, but the atmosphere around me was not inclusive. For example, in the school the teachers were not ready to teach disabled children, the citizens were conservators and living there somehow was stressful (Tako, 29 years old from Georgia, lived in China for two years).

With the results of the research of Forlin and Sin, in Chinese schools, 40% of teachers indicated that they had already had previous considerable interaction with people with disabilities, although only 11% had received at least 40 hours of training on educating students with disabilities, with the majority of 60% having had no training prior to the course. Similarly, only 13.5% had at least 30 full days of teaching experience with students with disabilities, although 40.5% had some experience. Their knowledge of policy as it related to people with disabilities was generally non-existent (60%) or poor (39%). Just over one-half of the teachers held average confidence in teaching students with disabilities, with 37% expressing low or very low levels of teaching confidence (Forlin, & Sin p.14). Susan M. Bridge also considers teachers' education as a basic point to develop inclusivity in Hong Kong. According to an Equal Opportunities Commission study, in some schools, less than 10 per cent of teachers have any special education training. Catering to students with diverse learning needs has become a compulsory module for preservice teachers to equip them for their future teaching careers. However, special education programs still lack components in curriculum design for inclusion (Bridges, et.al., p.4).

Making education available to all is seen as one of the most powerful levers to making society more equitable as it enhances social cohesion and trust. Inclusion is now considered to be a much broader philosophy that seeks to address inequity and fairness by focusing on the inclusion of all students regardless of disability, gender, ethnicity or other disadvantages (Forlin, & Sin p.9).

"From now on, I haven't seen any disabled work around me in any fields or industries. I think most of them are hard to be employed because of their inconvenience (I don't mind calling this discrimination). So what do they do for a living? A small part of them has to work hard to make a living, like open their own small business" (Anshen, 32 years old, a head teacher from Hefei).

"I have never worked with disabled persons (he is a teacher), but as far as I know, the government did some efforts to help physical disabilities. But it is impossible for the disabled to have equal opportunities as normal people. If you are the business owner what will you do? but there are some enterprises that did a good job. For example, the "Baixiang" food company in China (Jack, English teacher in China, 10 years of experience teaching in schools).

"Hong Kong is an international city and is overall advanced, we have anti-discrimination laws, and companies can get benefits and subsidies for supporting the employment of disabled persons. However, I don't think it would be possible to reach the "equal opportunities" part in most situations. There will be limitations for disabled individuals. But, to be fair, a lot of organizations are more willing to hire disabled persons and it is getting easier for them to get working experiences nowadays, so I believe it's an improving trend, yet, I still think it is way too early to say there is equal opportunity out there" (Kiki, 27 years old, art teacher in Hong Kong).

In the world, mostly in developed countries, the workspaces are inclusive. It means, that the working area mostly is oriented and adapted to the needs of people despite their sex, age, physical disability, orientation, etc.

Ideally, an inclusive workplace atmosphere will create an environment that encourages open-minded communication, stimulates innovation, and provides opportunities for all, employees to be creative in their work. When people conduct business, a diversified workforce and corporate culture play an influential role. Diversified teams promote more innovation and improve corporate performance, which in turn can motivate employees to be more dedicated.

China has a legal and moral obligation to ensure an environment where persons with disabilities can be equal and active members of society (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.7). From a human rights perspective, realizing the individual's right to dignity through work necessarily entails looking beyond pure employment figures, and understanding deeper societal trends which contribute to the barriers faced. These include deeply rooted prejudices against persons with disabilities, widely practised discrimination in everyday life and the workplace, as well as a general lack of government enforcement of legislation, that would help enable greater participation (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.7).

From the perspective of the employer, working with PWD is connected to the many stereotypes and fairness. Yi and Maziourine described some of them and mentioned, that the reason can be a lack of knowledge and resources available to find potential employees with disabilities that possess the right skills and experience (Yi & Mazourine, 2015).

- Limited access to education and appropriate training for people with disabilities.
- Some employers would rather pay a fine for failing to meet the government-instated quota, than hire a person with a disability.

- Negative perceptions and false assumptions about individuals with disabilities' capabilities to perform at work.
- Employers' limited experience of working with or interacting with people with disability.
- Lack of adapted infrastructure such as workplace accessibility or office tools (Yi & Mazourine, 2015).

A majority of persons with disabilities work at the bottom of the wage spectrum (people working in agriculture) and earn roughly half of what is earned in other low-income sectors, like manufacturing and construction. Urban households with persons with disabilities also receive a much lower share of their income from wages than average urban households—35 per cent compared to 64 per cent. This suggests, that most urban households with disabled members depend to a great extent on supplementing wage income with other sources. For example, payouts of social welfare programs or familial support (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.10).

Another very marginalized groups in China are LGBTQ population, totally they are 3-5 % of the society, but many of them hide their orientation in workplaces. In Chinese society, the visibility of sexual minorities is still extremely low. In schools, workplaces, or religious communities, only about 5% of sexual minorities choose to disclose their sexual orientation, gender identity or unique gender expression, more people come out to close family members, but even this group of people only accounts for 15% of the sexual minorities (UNDP, 2016). As of yet, there are no laws in China that protect LGBT employees from discrimination in society or the workplace.

YI and Zaziourine described a case when one employee was fired from his job after he was revealed as gay in a video that went viral online that showed him arguing with another gay man on a Shenzhen street. After it was posted online, he was subsequently fired from his job as a designer. The man sued his employer claiming he was being unfairly discriminated against because of his sexual orientation and is claiming 50,000 CNY and an apology as compensation. He says his employer is infringing on his right to equal employment. The employer maintains that his firing was not because of his sexual orientation, but rather due to his poor service attitude. The court has yet to reach a verdict (Yi & Mazourine, 2015, p.4)

Conclusion

As the research showed up, the main challenge for Hong Kong was and still is the education field, stereotypes and stigma from the society connected to marginalized groups. Because of the value of the city, it's diverse and full of people from different societies, sexual orientations, disabilities, etc. For the government of Hong Kong keeping an inclusive atmosphere still stays one of the biggest challenges.

The field of education is somehow trying to become inclusive. Inclusivity in this field means to be inclusive for the pupils, but not for the teacher or other employees in the field. In the interviews, our informants mentioned, that they have never had a colleague with a disability, and the workplace can't be inclusive for them.

Engaging fully with inclusive education requires teachers to be able to accept responsibility for modifying the curricula for different learners (Forlin, & Sin p.2). Education programs on the benefits of diversity and inclusive practices will help to create working environments that optimise the impact of differences. They can also show how to work with differences to achieve better business outcomes.

China's significant efforts to create a legal framework for the protection of the rights and interests of persons with a disability constitute an important step forward, but it has yet to effectively overturn stubborn patterns of exclusion and discrimination. Prejudices persist strongly in the workplace—it is still widely thought that persons with a disability can't productively contribute to economic growth (Schrader & Bruyère 2018 p.12). The most inclusive atmosphere, if we can say that, is in the field of commercial companies and enterprises YI and Zaziourine summarize their research results and list Diversity Best Practices in China TALENT:

- Hunan Anbang Pharmaceutical employing over 300 people with disabilities (disabilities WorkForLGBT, a platform to promote inclusive employment and workforce for LGBT professionals (LGBT) ;
- Wanda - Job fair in Guizhou for candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds (origin) CONSUMER & MARKET;
- Taobao advertising pink market (LGBT) ;
- Industrial Bank ATM accessibility (disabilities);
- Geely accessible car (disabilities) EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT;
- Alibaba capacity training for people with disabilities (disabilities);
- Sodexo mentoring program for Women (gender);
- IBM, welfare plan for same-sex couple (LGBT) POLICY & STRATEGY;
- L'Oréal diversity workshop for all managers and management trainees (diversity) CSR • L'Oréal solidarity sourcing (diversity) SOCIAL BUSINESS;
- Buy42.com, inclusive workplace and its charity sales revenue supporting people with disabilities (disabilities);
- Tomuni, an inclusive restaurant employing people with intellectual disabilities (disabilities);
- Xiaolongbao, a design agency that employs and provide job-seeking related training for young people with hearing disability (Yi & Mazourine, 2015, p.6).

Governments should improve to increase diversity in China, also they have to keep the right specially to disable and LGBTQ people in the workplace, and encourage businesses to create -inclusive work environments.

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