



油尖旺區議會民選議員陳偉強議員辦事處

Yau Tsim Mong District Councillor Chan Wai Keung

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District councils' non-English outlook translates into discrimination

(This paper is submitted to the meeting of District Council on 28 June. Some part of this paper was published in South China Morning Post on 12 May 2012)

The secretariats of district councils headed by the Home Affairs Department have taken the lead in linguistic discrimination against non-Chinese members of the public.

A telling example is Yau Tsim Mong district, which has a great number of non-Chinese-speaking residents. Dozens of South Asian as well as Caucasian residents in the district recently complained to me that the meeting papers and minutes uploaded onto the district council homepage are linguistically inaccessible to them.

Logging on to the English version of the homepage, I, as a district councillor, was taken aback by the paucity of English translation of our meeting documents. Over the past few years, district council secretariats have offered only sketchy one-page English reports of council meetings instead of full English versions of minutes. Our subcommittee meetings do not even have these one-page English reports.

To my best knowledge, some Chinese language officers are assigned to translate the documents from Chinese to English or vice versa at the secretariats of district councils. Is it absurd and outrageous that the Chinese Language Officer of Yau Tsim Mong District can produce as meager as only one-page English translation per month?

The quality and quantity of English translations of documents of different district councils throughout Hong Kong vary. Only Southern District Council seems keen to get all its documents translated into English. This is probably because one of its members is non-Chinese.

Most district councils in Kowloon and the New Territories do not provide English versions of meeting papers and minutes. Nor are the council members passionate about submitting papers or delivering speeches in English, even though some of the regional issues in the meetings are related to the welfare of non-Chinese communities. As a result, these groups, especially ethnic minorities, are kept in the dark about discussions and decisions made in district councils.



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To tackle this linguistic inequality and strive for a bilingual discourse in the 18 district councils in Hong Kong, I demand that:

1. All district council meeting papers and minutes be accessible to the public in English and Chinese;
2. Audio recordings of simultaneous English translations of council meetings (made when a non-Chinese-speaking official is in attendance) be uploaded to the district council homepage; and
3. Some sessions in district council meetings be conducted in English if non-Chinese communities have a stake in the items on the agenda.

This paper is submitted to the meeting of District Council on 28 June 2012 for discussion. I demand that the representatives of Home Affairs Bureau, Home Affairs Department, the Official Languages Division of Civil Service Bureau, Equal Opportunity Commission and etc attend the meeting. To make this item on the agenda accessible to non-Chinese communities, I will present my paper in English during the meeting. I also request that the Chairman of our District Council conduct the session about this paper in English. It is imperative that the representatives of the governmental departments concerned explain their language policy and respond to my questions in English as well in the meeting.

Chan Wai-keung,
Yau Tsim Mong district councillor

Encl.: Chan-Wai Keung, *District Councils' non English outlook translates clearly into discrimination*, South China Morning Post, A12, Saturday, May 12, 2012.



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I filed a complaint, and although I received a phone call from Yau Tsim Mong's district officer, I have still not been given a satisfactory explanation for this state of affairs.

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Most district councils in Kowloon and the New Territories do not provide English versions of meeting papers and minutes. Nor are the council members passionate about submitting papers or delivering speeches in English, even though some of the regional issues in the meetings are related to the welfare of non-Chinese communities. As a result, these groups, especially ethnic minorities, are kept in the dark about discussions and decisions made in district councils.

To tackle this linguistic inequality and strive for a bilingual discourse in the 18 district councils in Hong Kong, I demand that:

- All district council meeting papers and minutes be accessible to the public in English and Chinese;
- Audio recordings of simultaneous English translations of council meetings (made when a non-Cantonese-speaking official is in attendance) be uploaded to the district council homepage; and
- Some sessions in district council meetings be conducted in English if non-Chinese communities have a stake in the items on the agenda.

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文件中文譯本

(此文件一切以英文版作準)

不少油尖旺區的南亞裔及外籍人士向本人投訴，指區議會的提案文件及會議紀錄沒有英文譯本，使他們不明白當中內容。本人曾登入油尖旺區議會網頁查看，發現確有此情況。

於上屆的油尖旺區議會，亦只有於每次區議會大會舉行後，用一張紙寫成很簡單的摘要，並沒有英文版的詳細會議紀錄。

而其他區的區議會，每個區議會對翻譯文件也有不同的做法。當中港島南區的所有會議議程、提案文件及會議紀錄也有譯成完整的英文版本，但九龍和新界區的很多會議文件和會議紀錄也沒有英譯，如此安排，令少數族裔對區議會會議的討論內容一無所知，為何每個區議會也有落差，有什麼因素造成？

要求：

要求所有的區議會文件、會議紀錄應同時有中文版及英文版。



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Monolingual policy will eventually lead to dumbing down of district secretariat

南華早報 | 2012-05-21

EDT12| EDT

I refer to the letter by Yau Tsim Mong district councillor **Chan Wai-keung** ("District councils' non-English outlook translates clearly into discrimination", May 12).

Members of Tsim Sha Tsui Residents' Concern Group and friends and relatives living in Yau Tsim Mong are pleased to see that finally a district councillor is taking action on behalf of the significant number of residents in the area who speak Cantonese but cannot read Chinese.

We are used to seeing banners on the street telling us how much our district representatives are doing for minorities but these messages rarely translate into any action to improve communication and conditions.

Mr Chan is concerned that the minutes of Yau Tsim Mong District Council meetings, at which matters are discussed that directly affect the well-being of minorities, are not available to residents who are not proficient in written Chinese.

We have noticed the gradual reduction in recent years of bilingual information on this council's website. This means that minority residents are excluded from their right to information on decisions being made on their behalf. They are denied access to data they need to learn about funds allocated for local projects and determine if these funds are being wisely spent.

Not only are minority groups being marginalised with regard to the decision-making process, we also feel that the trend towards monolingualism is depriving our young people of opportunities to work at community offices and will result in a dumbing down of the district secretariat.

The decline in the use of English at district level appears to have accelerated since Tsang Tak-sing was appointed secretary for home affairs.

In the Home Affairs Department, there are three units which are supposed to deal with minority issues, the Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony, the Ethnic Minorities Forum and the Race Relations Unit. Why are they not addressing the rights of minorities to information on the operations of district councils? A check of the department's website shows that the minutes of the last forum meeting, held on December 20, have yet to be posted.

Included in the terms of reference of the Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony is a clause to "encourage all sectors of the community, particularly the ethnic minorities, actively to promote awareness of the issues entailed".

Perhaps the Audit Commission could look into what these units are doing and if we are getting any value for our tax dollars.

Paul Kumar, member, Tsim Sha Tsui Residents' Concern Group



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