

Title

Learning Multicultural Coexistence beyond the State:
NGO Practices in Hong Kong and its Educational Implications for Japan

Research Overview

This study explores how multicultural coexistence is sustained beyond state frameworks by examining NGO-led migrant support in Hong Kong. Through a comparative lens, it analyzes implications for Japan's evolving multicultural context, highlighting the role of civil society as a site of informal learning, inclusion, and community-based educational practices.

Purpose

In recent years, Japan has experienced a steady increase in migrant populations, accompanied by growing policy discourse on "multicultural coexistence" (*tabunka kyosei*). However, due to the lack of a comprehensive national framework for migrant integration, particularly in education, language acquisition, and community participation, support largely depends on local resources and community-based initiatives. In this context, NPOs play a crucial role as providers of informal and social learning opportunities, although their resources remain limited and contributions remain under-theorized.

This study aims to examine who assumes responsibility for sustaining multicultural coexistence in contexts where state support is partial or inadequate. It focuses on Hong Kong as a comparative case, where civil society organizations, particularly NGOs, have historically played a central role in providing social and educational support for migrants under constrained policy conditions.

By analyzing NGO practices in Hong Kong, this research seeks to (1) conceptualize multicultural coexistence as a form of "learning beyond the state"; (2) identify the pedagogical functions embedded in NGO activities; (3) derive implications for Japan's approach to migrant integration and social education. Ultimately, the study contributes to rethinking multiculturalism not as a state-led policy alone, but as a co-constructed process involving civil society and migrant communities.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, document-based research design to analyze the structure and functions of NGO-led migrant support in Hong Kong. Primary data sources include NGO annual reports, policy documents, and publicly available materials related to migrant support initiatives. These are complemented by secondary literature on migration, social education, and civil society in both Hong Kong and Japan.

The analytical framework draws on perspectives from comparative education, social education (lifelong learning), and theories of civil society studies. NGOs are conceptualized as spaces of informal and community-based learning, where migrants acquire not only practical skills but also social knowledge and opportunities for participation.

Hong Kong is selected as a critical case due to its unique socio-political context: despite its global city status and long history of migration, formal integration policies remain limited, resulting in a significant reliance on NGOs. In contrast, Japan represents an emerging migrant society where

state-led discourse on multicultural coexistence is more prominent, yet practical support systems remain fragmented.

Through cross-case comparison, the study identifies how multicultural coexistence is enacted with a focus on the role of non-state actors.

Results / Discussion

The findings suggest that NGOs in Hong Kong play a multifaceted role that extends beyond service provision, functioning as key agents of what can be conceptualized as “shadow governance” of multicultural coexistence. Historically, NGOs in Hong Kong have compensated for limited welfare provisions by offering community-based services to marginalized populations, including migrants and ethnic minorities. In recent years, their activities have expanded to include language education, legal support, cultural mediation, and advocacy.

Importantly, these practices can be understood as forms of informal and social education. NGOs create learning environments where migrants acquire not only linguistic and vocational skills, but also social knowledge necessary for navigating everyday life. At the same time, these spaces foster intercultural interaction and mutual understanding between migrants and local communities, contributing to broader processes of social cohesion.

In contrast, although multicultural coexistence in Japan is framed as a state-led policy priority, its implementation remains fragmented and uneven due to reliance on local governments with varying capacities. As a result, support systems-particularly in language education, community integration, and access to educational resources-remain insufficiently institutionalized, with the role of NPOs remains comparatively underdeveloped and unrecognized.

The comparison highlights several implications for Japan. First, it underscores the importance of recognizing NPOs as key actors in educational systems, particularly in contexts where formal systems are insufficient. Second, it suggests that multicultural coexistence should be reconceptualized as a learning process embedded in everyday community practices, rather than solely as a policy objective. Third, it points to the potential for stronger collaboration between state and civil society to create more flexible and responsive support structures.

At a theoretical level, this study shifts the analytical focus from state-centric models of multiculturalism to a multi-actor perspective, highlighting how multicultural coexistence is co-constructed through interactions among state institutions, civil society, and migrant communities, particularly within community-based and non-formal educational contexts.