

## 'Fake' census scandal can launch new ethical culture era

Allegations of fabricating statistics have been made against census officers.

The controversy involving the credibility of the Census and Statistics Department has damaged the Hong Kong government's reputation.

Firstly, the fact that census officers may have fabricated answers when conducting household interviews indicates the lack of scrutiny within the department.

If the allegations prove to be true, it would mean that those frontline officers involved were reckless when conducting surveys and had little respect for their profession. It would also mean senior government officials had breached their fiduciary duty.

Secondly, the issue illustrates the unethical mindset of those census officers allegedly involved. While some may believe such conduct is merely intelligent practice in the workplace, undeniably it is irresponsible behaviour and perhaps a product of a poor working environment which emphasises quantity (over quality) of surveys completed. Unethical conduct and a never-ending striving for results, at any cost, may lead to problems in a society.

Lastly, this has a negative impact on Hong Kong residents. Publishing fabricated employment statistics may hide the fact that the unemployment rate in Hong Kong is greater than we think.

In the course of providing legal services at my law firm, I have come across many foreigners who wish to migrate to Hong Kong. They rely heavily on government statistics so they can make an informed decision. Unfortunately, they may be innocent victims of negligent misrepresentation.

In the past, the government practised obscurantism [being vague and obscure], and was reluctant to hold any single officer responsible for similar scandals.

However, we live in a society where incorruptibility and honesty are highly valued. Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying has always demonstrated a strong and positive desire to govern Hong Kong.

I appreciate his hard work and as a result I have high expectations of him. What he needs to do now is restore the public's trust by holding people responsible for their actions. He should promote and cultivate a culture of responsibility in the Census and Statistics Department, in the hope of encouraging other governmental departments to follow suit.

There is no doubt that these incidents, if proved true, are a disgrace to Hong Kong. However, we can learn from this and ensure there is no repeat in the future.

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