

Study on Racial Encounters and Discrimination Experienced by South Asians

Report

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Note: Cases of “racial encounters and discrimination experienced by South Asians” are highlighted in the text.

Executive Summary

Background

1. A survey on “Study on Racial Encounters and Discrimination Experienced by South Asians” was commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to the Centre for Civil Society and Governance, The University of Hong Kong, and the Policy 21 Limited. Interviews were undertaken from December 2010 to April 2011. A total of 19 focus groups comprising 107 Chinese and South Asian stakeholders were held. The participants were classified into 5 groups by their status, namely, home-makers, retirees, employees, students, and NGO representatives.

Key Findings

2. Many South Asians, especially those who were born or spent a substantial part of their lives in Hong Kong treated Hong Kong as home. At the same time, local Chinese generally accepted South Asians as part of Hong Kong society. South Asian youth would visit their countries of origin, and would be willing to stay there for a short period of time. However, they would want to return to Hong Kong because they were used to the living environment, life-style, and social circle they built up here. They were familiar with Hong Kong and its ways of life, and it was here they felt more at home. The local Chinese community was aware of the long history of South Asians living in Hong Kong. They regarded South Asians as part of the Hong Kong community and believed they were entitled to the same rights and benefits as every other Chinese citizens of Hong Kong.

3. Most South Asian students, housewives, and retirees were generally happy with their lives in Hong Kong. In contrast to their countries of origin, which might be rife with war, natural disasters and poverty, Hong Kong was a peaceful and safe haven. They felt secure because basic needs, such as housing, education, and health were taken care of. There was also a security net to fall back on when they were not able to earn enough to feed their families. They reckoned that there were discriminations against South Asians, but they also perceived that discrimination could not be completely annulled in every part of the world. Hong Kong was on the whole considered a civilized society, and therefore the level of discrimination they encountered day-to-day was generally tolerated.

4. The main problems facing South Asians were learning to read and write Chinese for students, and finding employment for adults. Many South Asian students found learning written Chinese too hard for them and were forced to give it up soon when they did not receive adequate help. Limited knowledge of spoken and written Chinese would turn out to be a major factor against them in job seeking and tertiary education, for the Chinese language was now a standard entrance requirement of both employment and further study.

5. The most common types of discriminatory behaviour against South Asians were related to finding employment and on-the-job treatment. South Asian employees who suspected that they were subject to unequal treatment seldom made official complaint for fear of losing their jobs because it was not easy to establish a clear proof of discrimination. Socially, South Asians were offended by manners such as covering one’s nose in the

proximity of a South Asian, and avoid sitting next to a South Asian in public transportation. Unfortunately, Chinese who exhibited these behaviours might not be entirely aware that most South Asians found them rude and insulting. Some South Asians also reported that opening bank accounts and renting flats were still difficult.

6. South Asians in general did not think discrimination was too serious in Hong Kong, and they admitted that the situation was actually improving in the last ten years. Nevertheless, there had been little social interaction between local Chinese society and the South Asian community. The two appeared to co-exist in parallel; each got on with its own life and had little to do with the other. South Asians rarely seemed to be participating in Hong Kong society, not socially, culturally, or politically. The local Chinese community was aware of the presence of South Asian Hongkongers, but they might not have noted the absence of South Asians in Hong Kong Chinese's social, cultural and political scene. Impressively, for those Chinese who worked with South Asian colleagues, inter-cultural interaction and experience was positive.

7. Two factors seemed to have prevented interaction between the two groups: the lack of a common language and scant understanding of the others' cultures. Lacking a common language was perceived to be the biggest barrier separating local Chinese from South Asians. This was the most common reason given by Chinese focus group participants, especially housewives and retirees. Many of them were not fluent in English and thus lacked the means of communication. Non-English speaking Chinese housewives and elderly were unable to communicate with their South Asian counterparts beyond a polite nod or a simple greeting. Non-Cantonese speaking South Asian youths and adults found that English as a medium of communication might not be as accessible to the local Chinese community as they would have liked it to be. The situation might only be a little better with regard to Chinese youngsters.

8. The language barrier not only hindered social integration, but it has created a few misunderstandings. For example, English speaking South Asians found Chinese unwilling to speak to them. They concluded that Chinese were unfriendly on the assumption that most Chinese were able to communicate in English, which was not entirely correct. By the same token, most Chinese inaccurately presumed that South Asians did not understand Cantonese, and refrained to speak with them.

9. Inadequate understanding of each others' culture was also a major factor preventing interaction. Some Chinese complained about the strong smell emitting from cooking South Asian dishes. South Asians, however, pointed out that Chinese were so used to their own cooking that they did not realize it could also produce a pungent scent. Some devoted South Asians would pray several times a day and fast during a certain period of the year. Chinese might find these religious practices mysterious and South Asian cultures unfathomable.

10. Although South Asians and local Chinese live peacefully alongside one another today, there still exists bitter resentment if the Hong Kong government continues to close its eyes to the needs of South Asians. The group of South Asian Hongkongers who went through their education in English before the 1997 sovereignty handover found their employability worse than that of their fathers. To them, maintaining their living standards is already a challenge; upward social mobility is an unreachable dream. Their present impediment is partly a result of the change in political sovereignty and its corresponding changes in policy. This generation of South Asians had already been lost. It was not surprising to find them reproachful and

indignant. If future generations of South Asians end up in the same hopeless predicament, they may need to, like some members of the lost generation have already had, resort to anti-social behaviours to let go their fury and to publicize their futile struggle.

Recommendations

11. South Asians in Hong Kong had been accepted as full members of Hong Kong society, thus entitled to the same rights and benefits as any local Chinese. In this sense, their social inclusion has been achieved. However, there has not been a high degree of integration, for local Chinese and South Asians live in two separate communities without much interaction. In view of the results of the focus group interviews and overseas experiences, we propose the following measures to boost mutual understanding and social integration.

Employment

(1) Enhance South Asians' employment opportunities

The Government should take the lead to employ ethnic minorities by relaxing the Chinese language requirement in certain disciplines in civil service recruitment to demonstrate its appreciation of ethnic diversity in employment.

(2) Bridging expectations between South Asians and employers

There might be some stereotypical image of South Asians being not as hardworking as Chinese and Chinese employers being mean and calculative. The Government or NGOs can organize interflow workshops with successful exemplars to relay the practices and routines of South Asians to Chinese employers and inform South Asians of the usual expectations of Chinese employers.

(3) Encourage employers to hire South Asians

Big multi-national corporations do employ ethnically diverse employees at the senior level. However, more should be done to enable local enterprises to tap on the talent pools from ethnic minorities, especially at the working and trainee levels. In this respect, it is disappointing to note that the Vocational Training Council (VTC) offers only a few placement-tied courses for ethnic minorities. The VTC should proactively formulate a larger variety of placement-tied courses, intensify the Work Trial Scheme and apprenticeship programme on occupation categories, and assess if a factual work-based requirement of proficiency in written Chinese language is needed for a specific post.

(4) Enhance employment resources for South Asians

To make it possible for South Asians to find jobs outside of their personal networks, it is necessary to improve employment resources. For example, the Labor Department may make it a rule for all job vacancy notices (particularly online information) to be written in both Chinese and English. A designated employment counter can be set in the Labor Department to provide employment services and resources for ethnic minority residents including South Asians. When the Labor Department plans various employment related activities, there should be sessions catering to local Hong Kong residents who do not speak and read Chinese.

Education

(5) Greater support on learning Chinese

Knowing to read and write Chinese is crucial to the future of South Asians who choose to stay in Hong Kong. It is of utmost importance to help them to acquire an appropriate level of the Chinese language proficiency. Developing an alternative set of curriculum and assessment suitable for learning Chinese as a second language, plus extra resources to be allocated to help South Asian school children in learning Chinese from pre-primary levels should make a huge impact.

(6) Strengthen cultural sensitivity of educators

Cultural sensitivity is essential to guide students properly. Frontline teachers are on the whole not sufficiently equipped to deal with South Asian students in class. Making things worse, school notices and other kinds of communication between the schools and parents are predominantly in Chinese. Training to step up teachers' skills and sensitivity in dealing with students with different ethnic backgrounds should be provided for professional development. Schools should also provide non-Chinese speaking parents with alternative means of communication.

(7) Incorporate ethnic and cross-cultural diversity in the curriculum

The Government strives to build Hong Kong to become a cosmopolitan city. South Asian Hongkongers are entitled to be viewed as part of this achievement. In our school curriculum, the cultures of different ethnic groups living in Hong Kong should be introduced. For example, images of people of different ethnicities and races making up the Hong Kong society ought to be represented in textbooks so as to fully embrace these groups as part of Hong Kong.

(8) Improve educational opportunities for South Asians

Improvement has already been implemented that ethnic minority students can apply for university programs under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) route, based on the results of British General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Chinese) Examination. However, it seems that many faculties in

universities and colleges are still sticking to stringent Chinese admission requirement. As a lot of courses in various universities in Hong Kong are taught in English, the Chinese language requirement should flexibly be relaxed in the admission for South Asians. In addition, there should be more varieties in vocational and re-employment training courses for non-Chinese speaking groups.

Social interactions

- (9) Encourage ethnic minorities and Chinese to participate in cross-cultural activities

Programs offered by NGOs are generally culturally homogeneous – they are either targeted at Chinese or South Asian participants. Programs that are designed for both groups to jointly participate are still rare. NGOs should be encouraged to organize longer-duration programs for Chinese and South Asians to participate together. Furthermore, the vast majority of notices and publicity of events organized at the district or community levels are in Chinese. To encourage South Asian Hongkongers to take part in these events, publicity should also be given in English.

- (10) Promote the benefits of a culturally diverse society

The Government should exert greater efforts and take the lead in collaboration with ethnic groups, private sector and NGOs, in a bid to promote the benefits of a culturally diverse society through sustained public campaigns, in which South Asians and other ethnic minorities are represented.

- (11) Increase community resources to enhance social inclusion and understanding

South Asians, especially those educated here or have been living in Hong Kong for a long time, understand Chinese culture in various degrees. However, South Asian cultures are not known to most Chinese. Resources can be allocated to introduce South Asian cultures at a community level, particularly in areas and housing estates where South Asians reside in greater number or density. Furthermore, NGOs can, as a first step, promote cultural understanding by offering interest classes such as cooking ethnic food, making ethnic jewelry or other accessories, as well as cultural presentations such as music and dance. Such classes could also be used as a venue to promote inter-cultural interactions.

- (12) Increase public visibility of ethnic minorities

South Asians are not usually represented in the local mass media. Many South Asians who were born and educated in Hong Kong speak Cantonese like any other Chinese born and educated in local Chinese schools. Yet, they are disproportionately under-represented as public figures. It is only until very recently that we see more faces of South Asians on TV. Increasing the visibility of South Asians in the mass media could help instill the idea of South Asians as part of Hong Kong community.

Provision of goods, services and facilities

- (13) Educate providers of goods, services and facilities with cultural sensitivity to ethnic minorities

More publicity programmes should be formulated for providers of goods, services and facilities so as to elevate their sensitivity of cultural differences of South Asians and alleviate discrimination. For example, South Asians should not be denied of services in restaurants and shops. When opening a personal bank account and getting a credit card, South Asians should be treated the same as other ethnic groups. Real estate agents should not discriminate South Asians in the rental of a residential flat and commercial office.

Chapter 1 | Introduction

Background

1.1 The development of citizenship is now commonly seen as a process of extending social rights to different groups in a society. The British sociologist T.H. Marshall argues that granting civil and political rights to different groups is just part of the development of citizenship, which is not completed until social rights are also conferred.¹ In recent years, social citizenship is often discussed under the umbrella of social exclusion, or its twin concept, social inclusion. More and more policy makers have come to realize the negative repercussion that permanent exclusion of certain groups may bring to society. Nowadays, not only individual countries have policies addressing social inclusion,² policy regimes such as the European Union (EU) have specific policy framework and indicators aiming to reduce social exclusion.³ One of the main challenges of combating social exclusion, the EU admits, is to overcome discrimination, and to heighten integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and immigrants with the dominant society.

1.2 Notwithstanding specific background of race, ethnicity, culture and history is involved to give rise to social discords, the phenomenon of racial discrimination is commonplace all over the world.⁴ In Hong Kong, the Government recognizes the importance of social inclusion and in 1996 the EOC was established. In connection with ethnic minorities in a predominantly Chinese community in Hong Kong, the EOC has the statutory responsibility to work towards the elimination of discrimination, harassment and vilification on the ground of race. It has an obligation to promote equality of opportunities between persons of different ethnicities.

1.3 According to the 2006 Population By-census, a total of 342,198 ethnic minorities, constituting 5% of the whole population in Hong Kong, were living in Hong Kong. They comprised Filipinos (32.9%), Indonesians (25.7%), White (10.6%), Indians (6.0%), Mixed (5.3%), Nepalese (4.7%), Japanese (3.9%), Thais (3.5%), Pakistanis (3.2%), Other Asians (2.3%), Koreans (1.4%) and Others (0.6%). The number of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong was 343,950 in 2001, which was more or less the same as the number in 2006.

¹ Marshall, T H (1950), *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, Cambridge: University Press.

² Just to cite an example, the Australian government has recently produced a study entitled *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion incorporating the core indicators developed by the European Union and other illustrative indicators that could identify and monitor social exclusion in Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations, Australian Government, January 2009). <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Documents/1Economicimplications.pdf>

³ In 2006, the European Commission's Social Protection Committee has adopted a set of common indicators tracking social protection and social inclusion in its member states. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=750&langId=en>

⁴ Equal Opportunities Commission, HKSAR (2009). *Thematic Household Survey on Racial Acceptance, Annex III – Literature Review*.

1.4 Among the ethnic minorities, many of these South Asians⁵ have rooted in Hong Kong for several generations. Yet research findings showed that they were relatively less accepted ethnic groups by local Chinese in the community (acceptance level of 82% vs overall averaged racial acceptance level of 88%)⁶, probably because most of them belong to the lower socioeconomic strata and are more susceptible to racial discrimination. Indeed, a survey found that among various groups, not only were Indians/Pakistanis least trusted, people were least willing to work with them.⁷ A number of studies also revealed that South Asians were discriminated in various areas, especially employment⁸ and education^{9,10}. To this end, the present study will focus on the South Asians as they are the minority groups of the greatest community concern about their wellbeing and inclusion in the society.

1.5 The passage of the Race Discrimination Bill on 10 July 2008 was dated as a major milestone regarding anti-discrimination protection for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. It is noteworthy that eliminating racism can enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong as a business centre, uplift Hong Kong's international image and help demonstrate to the world that Hong Kong is a genuine cosmopolitan city.

1.6 In the context of advancement of social equality, one of the important outcomes to be achieved from the introduction of the Race Discrimination Ordinance is the availability of multicultural and multilingual services to ethnic minorities. The Government has committed to providing support services to ethnic minorities to facilitate their integration into the community. Funds were granted for non-government organizations to establish and operate four support service centres for ethnic minorities. To facilitate non-Chinese speaking students to learn the Chinese language, the Government has put in place a number of educational support measures such as curriculum adaptation, provision of teaching and learning materials, and after-school support services in order to cater for their special needs.

1.7 Nevertheless, the derivation of complaints and disputes concerning racial discrimination occurred following implementation of the Ordinance in July 2009. Learning from overseas countries with experience in racial issues, surveys should be undertaken as tools to monitor and evaluate the issue of racial discrimination, in terms of its new and more subtle forms in particular. In this connection, this in-depth focus group study was conducted with the objectives of collecting information in designing training and educational programs in the direction of promoting racial harmony, evaluating the implementation status, identifying difficulties encountered by the stakeholders when they seek compliance with the Ordinance.

1.8 The need to undertake this in-depth focus group study is also supported by the findings of a large-scale face-to-face baseline survey commissioned by the EOC in 2008. In

⁵ South Asians refers to people of South Asian descent, which include various subgroups owing to their diverse geographic, linguistic, and religious origins. The targeted subgroups in this study are Indians, Nepalese and Pakistanis who constitute one-seventh of the Hong Kong ethnic minority population.

⁶ Equal Opportunities Commission, HKSAR (2009). Thematic Household Survey on Racial Acceptance.

⁷ Chan J, Chan E (2006), "Charting the state of social cohesion in Hong Kong." *The China Quarterly*, 187, Sept, pp. 635-658.

⁸ Ku H B, Chan K W, Sandhu K K (2006). A Research Report on the Employment of South Asian Ethnic Minority Groups in Hong Kong.

⁹ Loper K A (2004). Race and Equality: A Study of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong's Education System.

¹⁰ Ku H B, Chan K W, Sandhu K K (2005). A Research Report on the Education of South Asian Ethnic Minority Groups in Hong Kong.

that survey, approximately 10,000 households across the territories were sampled to elicit public perception of racial acceptance under different areas including employment, education, provision of goods, services and facilities, and disposal or management of premises. Primarily, the survey findings reveal that overall average percentage of acceptance towards other ethnic groups among Chinese was more than 80% when taking different roles under afore-mentioned areas. The acceptance level was lower from stakeholders possessing one or more of the following demographic characteristics: homemakers, retirees, the elderly aged 65 or over, and people having received education at primary level or below.

1.9 In a quantitative household survey, it is not possible to explore the underlying reasons/causes for phenomena such as the reasons for the comparatively lower acceptance towards other ethnic groups among some particular groups of respondents, and details of causes of unpleasant experience of interaction with other ethnic groups. Hopefully, through the in-depth focus group study involving both local Chinese and a variety of ethnic minorities, details such as what kinds of behaviour/conduct leading to unpleasant experience and discerning whether these behaviour/conduct are related to racial discrimination or racially neutral conflicts could be explored.

Study objectives

1.10 The purpose of the in-depth focus group study to obtain information in designing training and educational programs in the direction of promoting racial harmony, evaluating the implementation status of the Race Discrimination Ordinance and identifying any difficulties encountered by the stakeholders when they seek compliance with the Ordinance. More specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- (a) To collect information on public (viz. Chinese and non-Chinese) perception of racial acceptance in the following areas within the scope of the Race Discrimination Ordinance:
 - i) Employment;
 - ii) Education;
 - iii) Provision of goods, services and facilities; and
 - iv) Disposal or management of premises;
- (b) To elicit from the public (viz. Chinese and non-Chinese) experience of any significant positive and/or negative impacts to their daily life in relation to employment, education, housing, health and social services, within the scope of the Race Discrimination Ordinance;
- (c) To explore the underlying reasons/causes of phenomena such as the reasons for the comparatively lower acceptance towards other ethnic groups among Chinese or non-Chinese, and details of causes of unpleasant experience of interaction with other ethnic groups (e.g. what kinds of behaviour/conduct leading to unpleasant experience and discerning whether these behaviour/conduct are related to racial discrimination or racially neutral conflicts);
- (d) To collect public views on the way forward about how acceptance may be improved in the areas specified as in a);
- (e) To solicit public expectation on the advancement of the Race Discrimination Ordinance.

Chapter 2 | Study Methodology

Study framework

2.1 Researchers pointed out that there were three levels of racism, namely personally-mediated, institutionalized, and internalized. **Personally-mediated racism** occurred via differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others according to their race/ethnicity (which referred to prejudice) and through differential actions toward others according to their race/ethnicity (which resulted in discrimination).¹¹ While in the past race discrimination was more overt in nature, discrimination recently was more ambiguous and subtle.¹² **Institutionalized racism** is the process of discriminating against certain ethnic groups of people through the use of biased practices. **Internalized racism** expresses itself when ethnic minority groups accept the negative messages put forth by the dominant culture as their own. For example, certain ethnic groups of people perceive themselves as limited in their ability to fully self-express, fulfill their dream, or determine their future.

2.2 Researchers also pointed out that there might be 4 distinct types of response to discrimination, namely withdrawal, tolerance/resigned acceptance, verbal and physical confrontation. The impact of acts of discrimination could include hypertension if one suppressed his/her frustration and lower self-esteem. Furthermore, how people responded to acts of discrimination could be affected by situational factors, including the relationship between victims and perpetrators of discrimination and response of others present at the scene.¹³

2.3 In this study, different levels of racism, including personally-mediated, institutionalized and internalized, as perceived by discussants participating in the focus groups will be examined, based on experience of acts of discrimination or perceived discrimination encountered. This would throw light on the underlying reasons or causes of discrimination. In addition, information will be gathered on responses to acts of discrimination or perceived discrimination, as well as perceived impact of discrimination.

¹¹ Kressin N R, Raymond K L, Manze M (2008), "Perception of race/ethnicity-based discrimination: a review of measures and evaluation of their usefulness for the health care setting", *Journal of health care for the poor and the underserved*, 19(3): 697 – 730.

¹² Bennett G G, Merritt M M, Edwards C L, Sollers J J III (2004), "Perceived racism and affective responses to ambiguous interpersonal interactions among African American men", *The American Behavioural Scientist*, 47(7): 963 – 976.

¹³ Wakefield W D, Hudley C (2005), "African American male adolescents' preferences in responding to racial discrimination: effects of ethnic identity and situational influences", *Adolescence*, 40 (158): 237 – 256.

2.4 In the choice of discussants for the focus groups and topics for discussion, reference was made to the EOC's study in 2008. It was found that people generally had lower acceptance towards other ethnic groups than their own, when taking up different roles as shown below. The degree of acceptance was lower with regard to home-makers, retirees, elderly aged 65 or above and those with primary education or below.¹⁴

- Service providers in restaurants, hair salons, boutiques, etc.;
- As parents choosing for their child a prestigious schools;
- As employees working with colleagues;
- As employees working under superiors;
- As employers offering job opportunities to qualified applicants;
- As employers determining the salaries of their employees;
- As landlords leasing premises to prospective tenants;
- As households communicating with neighbours next door;
- As family members having relatives; and
- As ordinary people inviting friends to gatherings.

Focus of the study

2.5 The survey is basically an in-depth opinion survey, aiming at exploring the following:

- (a) From people of Chinese origin, possible reasons for having lower acceptance, whether it is due to prejudice or stereotyping, actual (unpleasant) experience or institutionalized factors of racism. The target interviewees will cover those from different age-sex groups, having different economic activity status and with different educational attainment;
- (b) From those who are likely targets of racial discrimination, including those of ethnic minority, their experience of being discriminated against, how they react to such acts of discrimination and their perceived impact on them. The target interviewees will cover those from different age-sex groups, having different economic activity status and with different educational attainment.

2.6 Broadly speaking, the following four main categories of activities where racial discrimination could occur were covered in the study:

- (a) Discrimination in the field of employment, including recruitment, opportunities for training and promotion;
- (b) Discrimination in the field of public access, purchase of goods and services, and management or disposal of premises
- (c) Discrimination in the field of social interaction, including obstacles preventing participation in social interactions and people's biased attitude towards participation in social interactions;
- (d) Discrimination in the field of education and training.

¹⁴ Census & Statistics Department (2009), *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 39: Racial Acceptance*.

Opportunities were also be taken to gather views on the way forward about how acceptance may be improved and their expectation on the advancement of the Race Discrimination Ordinance.

Sample design

2.7 For focus group discussions, it is necessary and indeed not practicable to adopt scientific sampling design aimed at gathering views from a representative sample of the target population. Nevertheless, it is desirable to ensure that the focus group discussants cover a sufficiently wide cross-section of target respondents. To facilitate discussions, the size of the focus group should not be too large. The usual focus group size is around 7 to 8 discussants. Taking into account points raised above, the following target groups were organized:

Stakeholders	No. of focus groups conducted	No. of participants
<i>NGOs</i>	5	14
<i>Members of the public, Chinese</i>		
People who are home-makers	3	22
People who are retirees	2	13
People who are employed	2	15
Students	2	16
<i>Members of the public, South Asians</i>		
People who are home-makers	2	12
People who are retirees	1	6
People who are employed	1	4
Students	1	5
Total	19	107

Process of data collection

2.8 Conducting focus group discussions is very much different from the face-to-face or telephone interviews in questionnaire surveys. A focus group discussion is not to seek definitive response from individual respondents, following the sequence dictated by the interviewer based a pre-designed structured or semi-structured questionnaire. Instead, the role of the moderator in a focus group discussion is to encourage the respondents' response to a particular topic and to elicit their thinking, attitudes and ideas on the issue. The purpose is not

to reach a consensus in a focus group, but rather to encourage the respondents to express different points of view.¹⁵

2.9 Thus, it is essential that the moderator should avoid, during the discussion, putting forward his own thinking on the subject matter, or trying to guide the group towards a particular direction, or worse still, conclusion. In summarizing the findings of the discussion, the moderator should also avoid letting his/her own thinking on the subject matter affects the reporting. Indeed, some researchers even raised concern on possible biases introduced if the moderator shared the professional culture of the discussants or an expert in the field under study.¹⁶ The following procedure was adopted in conducting the focus group discussions:¹⁷

- (a) At the beginning of discussion, the moderator will try to establish rapport with the group by explaining the purposes of the discussion. He would have to ensure anonymity of opinions expressed by respondents to encourage better response;
- (b) Then the moderator will proceed to the list of issues to be raised for discussion. The moderator should try to start with the less intrusive and more general ones and then proceed to the more specific, more difficult and controversial ones. The moderator should also try to encourage discussion among the respondents as far as possible;
- (c) During the course of discussion, the moderator has to ensure that the list of issues required to be discussed are covered in the discussion;
- (d) At the end of the discussion, the moderator will try to re-confirm the opinions of different respondents on the various issues raised during the discussion, to ensure that any changes of minds at the course of discussion would be reflected.

¹⁵ Vaughn S, Schumm J S, Sinagub, J M (1996), *Focus Group Interviews in Education and Psychology*, Sage Publications, p.5.

¹⁶ Twohig P L, Putnam W (2002), "Group interview in primary care research: advancing the state of art or ritualized research", *Family Practice*, 19(3): 278 – 284.

¹⁷ Stewart D W, Shamdasani P M, Rook D W (2007), *Focus Groups, Theory and Practice*, Sage Publications.

Chapter 3 | Study Findings

Overview

3.1 Findings of the focus group interviews are discussed in the paragraphs to follow under four categories – employment, education, social interaction, and provision of goods, services and facilities. Within each of these four categories, the views of South Asians with regard to perceived discrimination and the difficulties they have encountered, as well as the opinions of Chinese towards South Asians are presented. Since non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in helping South Asians to adapt and fit in Hong Kong society, their observations and experiences are also reported separately. As noted in Chapter 2, the focus group interviews were organized into homogeneous groups of homemakers, retirees, employed persons, and students. Since their views were considerably similar, as evidenced from the study, no distinction among groups will be made unless further specified.

Employment

Views of South Asians

3.2 Seeking for jobs was one of the major difficulties faced by South Asians. Other than those with higher degrees and had expertise in certain fields, the best chance of getting jobs was by means of personal contact. Many South Asians looked for blue collar jobs, for the reason that they did not usually have the qualifications for the more comfortable and better-paid jobs. Very few of those who were born and raised in Hong Kong received higher education, and the higher degrees they obtained from their home countries were not recognized by the Hong Kong government. When they looked for jobs at the Labour Department, some of the most important information such as job description, duties and responsibilities, was written in Chinese, thereby posing great difficulties to them.

3.3 For South Asians who understood Cantonese, there were reports about suspected discrimination. It had been reported by focus group participants many times that South Asians were refused employment when potential employers found out their ethnic backgrounds. South Asian job seekers were asked to attend a face-to-face interview after a telephone conversation with potential employers, believing that they were going there to iron out the last details of employment. However, when potential employers met them in person, they would find different excuses, such as lack of knowledge of written Chinese, to refuse South Asians the jobs. Some South Asians regarded the requirement of written Chinese for manual jobs like dish-washing, laundry, cleaning, and construction, unreasonable.

3.4 A few South Asian Hongkongers expressed disappointment in the lack of opportunity to join civil service nowadays. They compared the situation with the pre-handover era, when South Asian police and correctional services officers were rather visible.

They pointed out that the Chinese language requirement in post-handover Hong Kong had essentially eliminated their chances of becoming civil servants.

3.5 On the job, both positive and negative experiences were reported. While many reported having little difficulty getting along with their Chinese colleagues, some South Asians felt being treated unequally by their employers. They might have been assigned to “3D” jobs – dangerous, difficult, and dirty – more frequently than their Chinese colleagues. They might not have received the recognition they deserved, and perceived their chances of promotion lower. They resented at being excluded from company social functions, such as celebrations of various Chinese festivals.

Views of local Chinese

3.6 The focus group participants generally did not hold any stereotypical image of South Asians who were in employment. They disagreed that South Asians were less hard-working and responsible than Chinese. They pointed out that a person’s attitudes was very individualistic, more a personal characteristic than a group trait.

3.7 Although not all Chinese focus group participants had South Asian colleagues, among those who had, they did not have negative experience working with South Asians. Indeed, they were very open about working with people of different races. They said they got along well with South Asian colleagues. They greeted and talked to each other. They did not have meals together because their South Asian colleagues usually brought their own lunch to work, and they were aware that due to their religion, South Asian colleagues had different eating habits. A few participants worked closely with South Asian colleagues, and their friendship improved as a result. They met socially, outside of the work environment.

3.8 One focus group participant happened to hire a South Asian woman to work in his hair styling shop, and he had only praises for the woman. He said he had no reservation hiring South Asians in the future. Again, he pointed out that working attitudes depended on the individual; there were lazy and irresponsible South Asian workers, just as there were languid and unreliable Chinese.

Observations

3.9 Judging from views expressed by discussants who are local Chinese, acts of discrimination or perceived discrimination are not likely to be personally-mediated, as they are quite ready to accept co-workers who are ethnic minorities, while realizing that there are inevitably differences in their religious beliefs and living habits. On the other hand, from views expressed by discussants who are ethnic minorities, there are obstacles in finding jobs, due partly to their inabilities to speak and in some cases write Chinese, and lack of recognized qualifications. Such obstacles are likely to be institutional in nature, as their chances of learning Chinese appear inadequate, especially those who are not educated or have not grown up in Hong Kong.

3.10 For those ethnic minorities who are able to find employment, their experience is mixed, judging from views expressed by ethnic minorities and local Chinese. Apparently, if

there is adequate communication between co-workers who are ethnic minorities and local Chinese, the chances of discrimination is much lower. However, due to difficulties in communications between ethnic minorities who do not speak Cantonese well with local Chinese, there will be a greater chance of misunderstanding and perceived discrimination. Furthermore, as communications with co-workers and clients are important asset at work, for those ethnic minorities who are handicapped by their inability to speak and write Chinese, their employment conditions, in terms of pay, promotion prospects and so on will likely be worse than their Chinese counterparts. Such acts of discrimination, as perceived by ethnic minorities, will be internalized in nature.

Education

Views of South Asians

3.11 Getting along with local Chinese students in schools did not seem to be a problem, as reported by South Asian students and mothers who had school age children. South Asian students made friends with local Chinese students; they mingled, played sports and did academic work together. Being able to speak a common language, be it Cantonese or English, was crucial in fostering interactions. A South Asian mother said, “My kids have Chinese classmates and they play computer games together at my home or at his Chinese friends’ home.”

3.12 Having difficulties in learning Chinese was a common issue mentioned by all focus group participants – young and old, employed and seeking employment, students and housewives. The majority of South Asians who were born or come to Hong Kong at a very young age were able to converse in Cantonese, but their level of written Chinese was quite poor. It was rather common for South Asian students to attend designated or international schools in their secondary education because they fell behind in the Chinese subject. By studying in designated or international schools, South Asian students could drop Chinese language and switch to learn another language. However, this decision would later greatly limit this group of youngsters’ chance of getting higher education and employability when they graduated.

3.13 The level of Chinese offered in designated or international schools was usually not up to the standard required by employers. South Asian youth who learned Chinese in these schools might be able to read simple Chinese, but they generally did not have the ability to communicate properly in written Chinese. They might manage to write a letter or a meeting minute, but seldom a business proposal. Considering the blooming economy in mainland China vis-à-vis most European and North American countries, knowledge of written Chinese has become almost a basic requirement for anyone looking for employment in the business sector. South Asians are at a disadvantage in this regard.

3.14 South Asians perceived that they would not be able to land better paid jobs in Hong Kong nowadays unless they were proficient in both spoken and written Chinese. Parents now had incentive to make their children learn Chinese. Unfortunately, they were not able to help however much their children were struggling with Chinese. Most of them did not know Chinese and could not afford private tutors. Schools might offer additional after school

Chinese classes for South Asian students, but there were other practical issues that parents needed to sort out before South Asian students could benefit from these extra help. For example, students would not be able to take school bus home, and parents were not able to fetch them. Furthermore, some parents sent their children to the Mosque every evening to learn the Holy Book. These young children might leave home at 6 o'clock in the morning and did not return until 9 o'clock in the evening, any extra classes might be too demanding on them.

3.15 Schools might not have the cultural sensitivity to deal with South Asian students. School notices were usually given in Chinese, so South Asian parents were not able to understand them. Teachers might not be sensitive to cultural practices of South Asians, and therefore unable to explain to other students, or make allowances for their festivities.

3.16 Furthermore, South Asians who studied in the Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) reported that in many classes, Chinese was used as the medium of instruction and reading materials were in Chinese, thereby restricting their choices of study. Similarly, it had been pointed out that the kind of vocational training or retraining programs that South Asians were able to take was mostly related to manual work, such as cleaning, servicing and construction. South Asians who were aspired to other kinds of work were hard to locate suitable programs.

Views of local Chinese

3.17 Chinese student participants interacted with South Asian schoolmates. They would mingle or work together with South Asian students if the school provided such an opportunity. Mothers of younger students reported that their children played with South Asian schoolmates. Bullying South Asians in school did not seem to be a big problem.

3.18 However, Chinese students reported that their knowledge of South Asians in Hong Kong, and the principle of anti-discrimination in general, were scant. Both topics received only brief introduction in their civic education class. There had not been in-depth discussions. South Asians in Hong Kong became a hidden, if not clandestine, group.

3.19 In discussing whether additional resources should be allocated to help South Asians learn Chinese, the views were mixed. In general, Chinese participants treated South Asians as Hongkongers, believing that they were entitled to public facilities as much as other Hongkongers. As to the allocation of extra resources to learn Chinese, the Chinese participants regarded it as one other proposal to help those in need. That was to say, whether or not funds should be allocated depended on the availability of resources and the urgency of this and other issues.

Observations

3.20 Based on views expressed by discussants, students of ethnic minorities do not encounter any discrimination. They mix and mingle well with school mates of Chinese origin. Hopefully, their happy experience at school will go a long way to fostering a harmonious relationship between ethnic minorities and local Chinese as these students grow up, graduate from schooling and enter the world of work.

3.21 However, it appears that schools are not sufficiently prepared to equip students of ethnic minorities with the necessary skills in spoken and written Chinese for their future employment. Their poor performance in Chinese language has also prevented them from getting admitted to local universities. This is probably due to the lack of resources on the part of schools to provide appropriate Chinese language education to students of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, teachers are also not adequately prepared and sensitive enough to ethnic and cultural diversity.

Social interactions

Views of South Asians

3.22 When South Asians and Chinese were put together in a bounded environment such as the workplace or school, they related to one another quite well. South Asians who had Chinese colleagues reported mutual respect, and some met each other privately in different social gatherings. Similarly, South Asian students mingled with Chinese students. Youngsters were willing to be married to Chinese, provided that they had the same religion.

3.23 Outright discrimination such as verbal abuse, or derogative gesture targeting at South Asians had decreased, according to retired South Asians who had been living in Hong Kong for most of their adult lives. They believed that Hong Kong society had become more civilized and the Hong Kong government, including the Equal Opportunities Commission, had raised public sensitivity about racial issues. The manner of treating South Asians has improved compared to two decades ago.

3.24 Still, there were behaviours that South Asians found uncomfortable. Two, in particular, were mentioned by all groups of South Asian we interviewed. One such behaviour pertained to covering noses when passing by South Asians, the other about avoiding sitting next to South Asians in public transportation. Whatever the reasons behind these behaviours, many South Asians found them rude and offensive. Also, despite public education, South Asians were occasionally called “Ah Cha”. It was also quite common for Chinese neighbours to complain about the strong smell and smoke relating to the use of Ghee or butter in cooking. One participant said, “When I put butter on the pan, the smoke is strong and therefore my neighbours complain about it.”

3.25 Notwithstanding the perceived decline in discrimination, there were not much social interactions between South Asians and Chinese outside the school and the work environments. Language had been a major barrier for South Asian housewives, for they and their neighbours

often did not speak a common language. Communication, when necessary, took place via their children who spoke Cantonese. As a result, the social circle of these South Asian women was greatly circumscribed. Language had also prevented these women from learning more about Hong Kong society, mainly because local news was reported in languages unfamiliar to them.

3.26 The social circle of South Asian housewives who spoke Cantonese or English was understandably wider. They were able to communicate with neighbours, other parents and teachers of their children's schools. They were able to participate in their children's school activities, as well as in community activities, which were mostly in Cantonese. Although more often than not their closest friends came from the same countries, some their interactions with Chinese neighbours and friends manifested high degrees of trust. For example, one woman entrusted her Chinese neighbour with the key to her home, and leave her child to the care of her Chinese neighbour when she had errands to run. She said, "My Chinese neighbour is very helpful. She buys meals for my kids." However, such interactions were not typical. By and large, there was still a line drawn between these South Asian women and their Chinese counterparts.

3.27 There appeared to be more interaction between South Asian men and local Chinese, but these interactions seemed to be more superficial than deep, restricting mostly to a few greeting words. It was also much easier for South Asian youth to be socially included. Most of them spoke Cantonese or English, so they had a common language to communicate with the local community. Many of them were educated in Hong Kong, so they made friends with local students in school. There was no psychological barrier to overcome to mingle with Chinese. Playing sports, whether alongside or against Chinese, was seen as part of their daily lives. All the South Asian youth participants who grew up in Hong Kong called Hong Kong home.

Views of local Chinese

3.28 Other than in school and the workplace, most of the interactions between Chinese and South Asians were conducted at a level of maintaining appropriate demeanor. More often than not, they were polite nods and informal greetings. Most of the Chinese participants would gladly take South Asians as friends, colleagues, or neighbours. Chinese parents would accept South Asian in-laws, respecting the choices of their children. However, Chinese youngsters were less enthusiastic about marrying to or partnering with South Asians. Much more so than Caucasians, they hesitated about establishing deeper personal relationship with South Asians, fearing the almost insurmountable challenges that inter-cultural marriages needed to overcome.

3.29 Chinese participants attributed the scarcity of interaction with South Asians to the absence of a common language. Of course, this was a valid reason only to the group of new immigrants. Many South Asians actually spoke Chinese. It transpired that the social lives of Chinese participants just did not include South Asians. If they had no South Asian neighbours, colleagues or schoolmates, it was hard for them to have a chance to interact with South Asians socially.

3.30 Furthermore, Chinese participants had the perception that South Asians would like to keep to themselves, seldom venturing outside their own group. Some observed that South Asian women always avoided making eye contact, and concluded their self-imposed seclusion a result of an inferior feeling.

3.31 Chinese participants were aware that local Chinese would sometimes cover their noses when they were near South Asians, or avoid sitting next to them in public transportation. However, they denied that such behaviour was driven by discrimination. They explained that South Asians usually had strong body odor, and some had big physique. It was not South Asians per se that made local Chinese avoid them, what they were trying to get away from was anybody who, regardless of race and ethnicity, carried an unpleasant smell. The same logic applied to not sitting next to big South Asians in public transportation.

3.32 Some Chinese participants felt that South Asian children were naughty; they were rowdy, and they played and ran liberally in parks or the public areas in housing estates. Despite their activities might be causing nuisance to people in the surrounding, their parents allowed them to continue. Chinese participants felt that South Asians were more lenient than Chinese parents in disciplining their children.

3.33 Chinese participants admitted that they knew little about South Asian cultures. They were only able to say something about South Asian foods. South Asian festivities and customs were entirely foreign to them. They would like to know more about South Asian cultures.

Observations

3.34 Obviously, common interactions between ethnic minorities and local Chinese and better understanding of each others' culture, traditions and living habits will help promote inclusiveness and reduce discrimination, personally mediated or internalized. For the younger generations, especially those ethnic minorities, interactions between them and local Chinese are easier. However, for the older generations, females and those who do not speak Chinese, language barriers and other traditional practices will create barriers for more interactions and better understanding, giving the false impression that ethnic minorities are unwilling to befriend with local Chinese and vice versa.

3.35 It is also noted that apart from opportunities provided by schooling and employment, there are few chances for active interactions between ethnic minorities and local Chinese. Passive nodding and greetings will not promote better understanding and inclusiveness. In schools, at workplace and in the community, it appears more work remains to be done, in order to bring ethnic minorities and local Chinese together and participate in activities that help understand each others' culture and traditions, which in turn promote better understanding, tolerance and inclusiveness.

Provision of goods, services and facilities

Views of South Asians

3.36 South Asians had not been denied of services in restaurants and shops. As a focus group participant said, “Chinese are shrewd business people, they care about making money. As long as you bring business to their shops, it really doesn’t matter what ethnicity or race you are.” However, some South Asians felt that they had not received the same level of service compared to other customers. For example, they were not served in restaurants or attended to in shops as quickly as other customers. But this feeling was not unanimous; many South Asian focus group participants felt that they were treated no differently from other customers.

3.37 Many South Asians reported that opening a personal bank account and getting a credit card was difficult. For reasons unbeknown to them, they were refused by many commercial banks. As they believed they had produced all the necessary documents for opening a bank account, the banks had little legitimate reasons to refuse them the service. They therefore regarded it as a possible case of racial discrimination.

3.38 Many South Asians also found it hard to rent a residential flat and commercial office. Real estate agents discouraged them in the first place, often telling them that Chinese property owners did not want to lend to South Asians. When they needed to rent a place, they had to turn to their friends for help. However, some South Asian participants rented their places directly from Chinese landlords, thereby proving real estate agents wrong. Their experiences told them that the barrier of renting a place came from the real estate agents.

3.39 Some South Asians would like to see more translation service being provided in public hospitals. They reckoned that such a service was provided by NGOs, but it would be very hard for them to get translation in emergency situation. Having someone who understands their language stationed in major public hospitals, or hospitals South Asians frequently visited would ease their minds. Also, the language barrier made it almost hopeless for South Asians to stay in elderly homes.

Views of local Chinese

3.40 Chinese participants did not feel and had not encountered any cases in which South Asians were denied goods, services and facilities on the basis of race and ethnicity.

Observations

3.41 For access to services and facilities, apparently there is little discrimination that is institutional. Ethnic minorities, like local Chinese, enjoy similar access. However, due to language problems, some of them will encounter problems in getting the required services on

time. Needless to say, there are resource implications in providing adequate and timely translation services for ethnic minorities who do not speak Chinese. On the basis of equal treatment, it is believed that local Chinese will face similar problems if they cannot speak Chinese. However, equal treatment does not equate with equal opportunities. Providers of services and facilities should be aware of handicaps faced by ethnic minorities and should take necessary steps to ensure that there is genuine equality of opportunities.

3.42 Problems are also faced by some ethnic minorities in their use of services. For example, banks have requirements which ethnic minorities have difficulties in complying with. Owners of properties, due to their lack of understanding, are reluctant to rent out their premises to ethnic minorities, especially when they receive other offers from potential tenants who are local Chinese. Obviously, more efforts are required to address people's lack of understanding and help ethnic minorities overcome barriers introduced by businesses intentionally or unintentionally.

Bitter experience of discrimination: a generation lost

3.43 While most discussants who were ethnic minorities did not have any bitter experience of discrimination, attempt has been made in the course of study to interview a group of ethnic minorities who were very unhappy over incidents of discrimination. Participants in the focus group discussion comprised adult male Pakistani. Half of the group was born and educated in Hong Kong. All except one spoke fluent Cantonese, but only one could read Chinese. Those who were educated in Hong Kong had attended designated schools. While the participants may not be representative of all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, their experience serves as a useful reference in drawing up remedial measures to address future acts of discrimination.

3.44 Most members of this group were bitter about their experience. They treated Hong Kong as home and had no intention of returning to their countries of origin in the immediate future. Unfortunately, they had encountered numerous discriminations in various aspects of their lives, and they did not see any prospect in their future. They sometimes resorted to anti-social behaviours. Indeed, three of the participants had been convicted and jailed. This group of South Asians did not blame Hong Kong society; on the contrary, they admitted that discrimination by local Chinese had generally decreased. They accused the Hong Kong government of overlooking the needs of its South Asian citizens, various government departments of being culturally insensitive, and the law enforcers of prejudice against South Asians.

3.45 All participants in this group had jobs now, but they all acknowledged the difficulties of finding employment, especially for those South Asians who did not speak and read Chinese. Like many South Asian students, they gave up learning Chinese in school. They did not understand the consequences of not learning Chinese at the time. Before the handover, South Asians who did not read Chinese were still able to enter the civil service. The government's policy had changed since the handover, and now knowledge of spoken and written Chinese was required, thus closing the door to civil service. Hunting job through the Labor Department was almost futile. Job descriptions were in Chinese and there was no additional help assigned to South Asians. The government had also not given extra incentive to employers to hire South Asians.

3.46 As a result of a court ruling, South Asians faced stern job competition from asylum seekers in Hong Kong. The Court ruled in 2008 that asylum seekers had the right to find employment while waiting for the results of their asylum applications. Many asylum seekers were South Asians, and they were willing to work for lesser pay and in harder condition. Employers therefore preferred to hire asylum seekers to local South Asians.

3.47 Some focus group participants attributed the difficulty of renting flats to asylum seekers. A flat rented to an asylum seeker might in reality house many more fellow seekers. They often left their flats in awful conditions and sometimes evaded the flats without paying up the rents. As many asylum seekers happened to be South Asians, flat owners confused them with local South Asians and refuse to rent their flats to any South Asians.

3.48 Some had dreadful experience with the police. Participants of this group claimed that South Asians were more susceptible to police abuse. South Asians were often searched in the streets, and there were cases in which the policemen had publicly insulted South Asians and their countries. In one incident when the participant was stopped by a policeman who called him “Ah Cha” with foul language, he objected to the policeman’s insult and got into an argument. He ended up staying in prison for 20 days. In his opinion, the judge who handed down the sentence was also discriminatory because he/she believed that a policeman would not have used those nasty words against South Asians. The judge said, “I have listened to statements from both sides and I think the policeman didn’t do that”. It was not fair to him. In another incident, the participant and his brother went to jail because they were involved in a fight. According to the participant, he and his brother would not have been convicted had the police carried out a more thorough investigation. However, the police had already formed a biased view about South Asians being trouble-makers, and would not even bother to review the CCTV.

3.49 This group felt that they were the victims of changes in government policy and were treated unequally by government officers. They were bitter because they were part of Hong Kong society, but the government did not seem to recognize their existence. They struggled to find a living, but the odds against them were insurmountable. They felt stranded in the changes in Hong Kong’s political environment and helpless in the face of government policy.

Observations

3.50 The present study is not designed to gather evidence to confirm if incidents of bitter experience cited by discussants above are merely isolated incidents or a wide spread phenomenon. However, these unhappy encounters on the part of ethnic minorities could be and should be avoided. These incidents, if not properly attended to, will breed further grievances and misunderstanding, reinforcing discrimination that is personally mediated or internalized. There should be heightened communications between parties concerned to correct any misunderstanding. There should also be channels for complaints and the process of handling complaints should be open and transparent. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity of officers of government departments responsible towards ethnic minorities should be enhanced.

Perspectives of service providers: views of NGOs

3.51 Irrespective of whether their mission is service-oriented or policy advocacy, NGOs that work with South Asians make their difficulties stand out in sharp relief. Social workers and other staff of both types of NGOs were interviewed in the study. The service-oriented NGOs focus on helping South Asians to solve everyday problems, be they finding employment, adapting to life in Hong Kong, locating schools for children, accompanying South Asians to different government departments, or providing translation in hospitals. The policy advocacy group in the study aims at promoting racial equality; in addition to handling potential discriminatory practices, it strives to draw public attention to various shortcomings in public policy that possibly stifle social inclusion and upward social mobility.

3.52 NGOs acknowledged the improvement in Hong Kong society's acceptance of South Asians. They believed that enactment of Disability Discrimination Ordinance and Racial Discrimination Ordinance had helped induce the change because it educated society that everyone, able and disabled, Chinese and non-Chinese, was protected under the law.

3.53 Although most NGOs believed that Hong Kong society as a whole was less discriminatory against South Asians, indirect discrimination was still prevalent nowadays. They cited employment interviews as a typical example. It was rather common for South Asian job seekers to be rejected when the employers met them in person and discovered that the prospective employer they talked to over the phone was South Asian. Employers would normally use proficiency in reading and writing Chinese as a reason for not hiring South Asians. Newly arrived South Asians found themselves in an arduous plight, for the language requirement applied even to elementary jobs like dish-washing and cleaning. It was difficult to locate jobs through the Labor Department because in the majority of cases, job description and responsibility was written in Chinese, thereby precluding South Asians who did not read the language. In general, Chinese employers preferred hiring Chinese to South Asians, and would only hire South Asians as a last resort. The usual way for South Asians to seek employment was through friends and relatives, which partially explained their confinement to certain types of job and social circle.

3.54 South Asians who were employed did not received similar treatment as their Chinese counterparts. In areas such as salary, job assignment, promotion and appraisal, Chinese appeared to be favored over South Asians; equal work did not always bring equal treatment. Non-Cantonese speaking South Asians who were employed in manual tasks, such as security guard, found it difficult to communicate with fellow workers, for most did not speak English.

3.55 For South Asian students, NGOs regarded learning the Chinese language as their biggest struggle. Parents might not know how seriously their children were lagging behind in their Chinese subjects until it was too late. Because learning the Chinese language was too demanding for many youngsters, they chose to enter designated or international schools where the level of the Chinese language was much lower. In very little time, South Asian students forgot much of the written Chinese they had learned in local school. NGOs extracted several implications from South Asian students giving up learning Chinese. Firstly, South Asian students did not receive enough help in the Chinese Language subject. Secondly, there was a breakdown in communication between South Asian parents and school teachers. Thirdly, South Asian parents might not have been fully aware of the grave consequences that

ignorance of written Chinese would have on the future of their children, especially in terms of tertiary education and employment.

3.56 NGOs pointed out that the kinds of training the Employees Retraining Board provided to ethnic minorities were very basic, such as hotel housekeeping, cleaning and washing, construction works and automobile mechanics. To enhance the employability of South Asians, it would be helpful to raise the level to provide training in the more technical fields and to offer vocational training diploma programs.

3.57 With reference to the provision of goods, services and facilities, South Asian would not be refused in most commercial premises. However, it was rather common for them to be refused by banks. NGOs reported that they received complaints about banks refusing to open accounts for South Asians. Some South Asians also experienced difficulties in renting residential or commercial flats.

3.58 NGOs had programs designed specifically for South Asian women. Social integration for South Asian women who spoke Cantonese or English was not a major problem. The situation was much harder for those who did not understand either language, with Cantonese in particular. Thus, among NGOs' many programs was teaching South Asian women practical Cantonese. However, not all groups of South Asian women were receptive to the efforts of NGOs. Muslim Pakistani women, for example, were not used to going out in the absence of men's company. Even NGOs found it a challenge to reach out to this group of women.

3.59 NGOs that were more critical of the Hong Kong government's racial policy accused the government of committing institutional discrimination. Examples were cited in the following areas. Firstly, schools were not required by law to provide extra facilities to South Asians. There was not a requirement to provide an inclusive learning environment and most teachers did not receive cultural sensitivity training. Secondly, job vacancy notices posed in the Labor Department were mostly in Chinese. Thirdly, elderly Chinese who lived in Guangdong were eligible to receive CSSA and Old Age Allowance, but not South Asians who moved back to their countries of origin. Fourthly, unlike the pre-Handover era, a person who did not know Chinese nowadays could hardly join the civil service. Fifthly, policies geared towards new arrivals have heavily concentrated on Chinese new arrivals, and largely ignored the needs of South Asians. Lastly, there was no provision to teach Chinese as Second Language.

Observations

3.60 Hong Kong has made much progress in reducing race discrimination, thanks to the efforts of EOC, government departments and NGOs. However, it transpires from discussions with NGOs that partly due to negligence and/or ignorance on the part of those providing services, including banks and government departments, ethnic minorities still face hurdles in enjoying equality of opportunities. Undoubtedly, resources are a consideration. However, given the differences in cultural and language barriers, equality of treatment for ethnic minorities and local Chinese does not mean equal opportunities. There is definitely room for improvement and a need to exert greater efforts from all concerned in minimizing discrimination that is institutional in nature and in removing barriers to enjoy equal opportunities by ethnic minorities.

Chapter 4 | Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

4.1 This study was based on 19 focus group interviews. The purpose was to find out perception of racial acceptance of Chinese towards South Asians and vice versa with regard to employment, education, daily social interaction, as well as provision of goods, services and facilities. Each focus group was homogeneously constituted on the basis of the participants' economic activities and race. Interviews were carried out with Chinese and South Asian students, employed, retirees, and housewives. Among the participants, 14 representatives from 5 NGOs were also interviewed. After analysing what the participants expressed as shown in Chapter 3, conclusion and recommendations were made with reference to experiences from overseas countries.

4.2 It is noteworthy that the Australian government has designed a series of measures to allow inclusion of ethnic minorities in community and settlement of immigrants in a foreign land.¹⁸ They include a multicultural policy, provision of integrated settlement service and centralized interpretation service, and partnership among different sectors including Government departments, NGOs, commercial enterprises and the general public as well. The essence is to encourage ethnic minorities to participate in the community. Similar practices catering to local people's specific needs in terms of employment, education, receptive platforms of services, and social and cultural interactions are also administered elsewhere in the EU countries.¹⁹

4.3 On the list of difficulties encountered by ethnic minorities, it is well recognized that language barrier is the biggest hurdle for them to fully integrate into the community. Research on second and foreign language education has long associated motivation with language learning.^{20,21} No matter the nature of motivation is to get a better job (instrumental), to make friends (integrative) or to achieve a pleasant learning experience (situational), all the orientations are essential for acquiring the language.²² Indeed, these research findings are good hints to policy makers and educators in designing effective programmes for ethnic minorities to overcome the language barrier.

4.4 Back to Hong Kong, Many South Asians, especially those who were born or spent a

¹⁸ Hong Kong Council of Social Service (2006). Seminar on EM Livelihood in HK – Studying Australia's Experience – Moving towards a multicultural Hong Kong. http://www.hkcss.org.hk/fs/SemMar28_06/Sem_EM/EM%20Powerpoint_rev.pdf

¹⁹ European Parliament and of the Council – Integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants. <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/key-themes/integration-of-ethnic-minorities-and-immigrants-1>

²⁰ Lu X H (2008). Motivation and Achievement in Chinese Language Learning: A Comparative Analysis. In: Chinese as a heritage language: fostering rooted world citizenry, edited by He A W Y & Xiao Y. University of Hawaii Press.

²¹ Gardner R C (1985). Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation. London: Edward Arnold.

²² Gan L K (2010). Non-Chinese kids are speaking Mandarin. <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20100525-218337.html>

substantial part of their lives here treated Hong Kong as home. At the same time, local Chinese generally accepted South Asians as part of Hong Kong society. South Asian youth would visit their countries of origin, and would be willing to stay there for a short period of time. However, they would want to return to Hong Kong because they were used to the living environment, life-style, and social circle they built up here. They were familiar with Hong Kong and its ways of life, and it was here they felt more at home. The local Chinese community was aware of the long history of South Asians living in Hong Kong. They regarded South Asians as part of the Hong Kong community and believed they were entitled to the same rights and benefits as every other Chinese citizens of Hong Kong.

4.5 Most South Asian students, housewives, and retirees were generally happy with their lives in Hong Kong. In contrast to their countries of origin, which might be rife with war, natural disasters and poverty, Hong Kong was a peaceful and safe haven. They felt secure because basic needs, such as housing, education, and health were taken care of. There was also a security net to fall back on when they were not able to earn enough to feed their families. They reckoned that there were discriminations against South Asians, but they also perceived that discrimination could not be completely annulled in every part of the world. Hong Kong was on the whole considered a civilized society, and therefore the level of discrimination they encountered day-to-day was generally tolerated.

4.6 The main problems facing South Asians were learning to read and write Chinese for students, and finding employment for adults. Many South Asian students found learning written Chinese too hard for them and were forced to give it up soon when they did not receive adequate help. Limited knowledge of spoken and written Chinese would turn out to be a major factor against them in job seeking and tertiary education, for the Chinese language was now a standard entrance requirement of both employment and further study.

4.7 The most common types of discriminatory behaviour against South Asians were related to finding employment and on-the-job treatment. South Asian employees who suspected that they were subject to unequal treatment seldom made official complaint for fear of losing their jobs because it was not easy to establish a clear proof of discrimination. Socially, South Asians were offended by manners such as covering one's nose in the proximity of a South Asian, and avoid sitting next to a South Asian in public transportation. Unfortunately, Chinese who exhibited these behaviours might not be entirely aware that most South Asians found them rude and insulting. Some South Asians also reported that opening bank accounts and renting flats were still difficult.

4.8 South Asians in general did not think discrimination was too serious in Hong Kong, and they admitted that the situation was actually improving in the last ten years. Nevertheless, there had been little social interaction between local Chinese society and the South Asian community. The two appeared to co-exist in parallel; each got on with its own life and had little to do with the other. South Asians rarely seemed to be participating in Hong Kong society, not socially, culturally, or politically. The local Chinese community was aware of the presence of South Asian Hongkongers, but they might not have noted the absence of South Asians in Hong Kong Chinese's social, cultural and political scene. Impressively, for those Chinese who worked with South Asian colleagues, inter-cultural interaction and experience was positive.

4.9 Two factors seemed to have prevented interaction between the two groups: the lack of a common language and scant understanding of the others' cultures. Lacking a common

language was perceived to be the biggest barrier separating local Chinese from South Asians. This was the most common reason given by Chinese focus group participants, especially housewives and retirees. Many of them were not fluent in English and thus lacked the means of communication. Non-English speaking Chinese housewives and elderly were unable to communicate with their South Asian counterparts beyond a polite nod or a simple greeting. Non-Cantonese speaking South Asian youths and adults found that English as a medium of communication might not be as accessible to the local Chinese community as they would have liked it to be. The situation might only be a little better with regard to Chinese youngsters.

4.10 The language barrier not only hindered social integration, but it has created a few misunderstandings. For example, English speaking South Asians found Chinese unwilling to speak to them. They concluded that Chinese were unfriendly on the assumption that most Chinese were able to communicate in English, which was not entirely correct. By the same token, most Chinese inaccurately presumed that South Asians did not understand Cantonese, and refrained to speak with them.

4.11 Inadequate understanding of each others' culture was also a major factor preventing interaction. Some Chinese complained about the strong smell emitting from cooking South Asian dishes. South Asians, however, pointed out that Chinese were so used to their own cooking that they did not realize it could also produce a pungent scent. Some devoted South Asians would pray several times a day and fast during a certain period of the year. Chinese might find these religious practices mysterious and South Asian cultures unfathomable.

4.12 Although South Asians and local Chinese live peacefully alongside one another today, there still exists bitter resentment if the Hong Kong government continues to close its eyes to the needs of South Asians. The group of South Asian Hongkongers who went through their education in English before the 1997 sovereignty handover found their employability worse than that of their fathers. To them, maintaining their living standards is already a challenge; upward social mobility is an unreachable dream. Their present impediment is partly a result of the change in political sovereignty and its corresponding changes in policy. This generation of South Asians had already been lost. It was not surprising to find them reproachful and indignant. If future generations of South Asians end up in the same hopeless predicament, they may need to, like some members of the lost generation have already had, resort to anti-social behaviours to let go their fury and to publicize their futile struggle.

Recommendations

4.13 South Asians in Hong Kong had been accepted as full members of Hong Kong society, thus entitled to the same rights and benefits as any local Chinese. In this sense, their social inclusion has been achieved. However, there has not been a high degree of integration, for local Chinese and South Asians live in two separate communities without much interaction. In view of the results of the focus group interviews and overseas experiences, we propose the following measures to boost mutual understanding and social integration.

Employment

(1) Enhance South Asians' employment opportunities

The Government should take the lead to employ ethnic minorities by relaxing the Chinese language requirement in certain disciplines in civil service recruitment to demonstrate its appreciation of ethnic diversity in employment.

(2) Bridging expectations between South Asians and employers

There might be some stereotypical image of South Asians being not as hardworking as Chinese and Chinese employers being mean and calculative. The Government or NGOs can organize interflow workshops with successful exemplars to relay the practices and routines of South Asians to Chinese employers and inform South Asians of the usual expectations of Chinese employers.

(3) Encourage employers to hire South Asians

Big multi-national corporations do employ ethnically diverse employees at the senior level. However, more should be done to enable local enterprises to tap on the talent pools from ethnic minorities, especially at the working and trainee levels. In this respect, it is disappointing to note that the Vocational Training Council (VTC) offers only a few placement-tied courses for ethnic minorities. The VTC should proactively formulate a larger variety of placement-tied courses, intensify the Work Trial Scheme and apprenticeship programme on occupation categories, and assess if a factual work-based requirement of proficiency in written Chinese language is needed for a specific post.

(4) Enhance employment resources for South Asians

To make it possible for South Asians to find jobs outside of their personal networks, it is necessary to improve employment resources. For example, the Labor Department may make it a rule for all job vacancy notices (particularly online information) to be written in both Chinese and English. A designated employment counter can be set in the Labor Department to provide employment services and resources for ethnic minority residents including South Asians. When the Labor Department plans various employment related activities, there should be sessions catering to local Hong Kong residents who do not speak and read Chinese.

Education

(5) Greater support on learning Chinese

Knowing to read and write Chinese is crucial to the future of South Asians who choose to stay in Hong Kong. It is of utmost importance to help them to acquire an appropriate level of the Chinese language proficiency. Developing an alternative set of curriculum and assessment suitable for learning Chinese as a second language, plus extra resources to be allocated to help South Asian school children in learning Chinese

from pre-primary levels should make a huge impact.

(6) Strengthen cultural sensitivity of educators

Cultural sensitivity is essential to guide students properly. Frontline teachers are on the whole not sufficiently equipped to deal with South Asian students in class. Making things worse, school notices and other kinds of communication between the schools and parents are predominantly in Chinese. Training to step up teachers' skills and sensitivity in dealing with students with different ethnic backgrounds should be provided for professional development. Schools should also provide non-Chinese speaking parents with alternative means of communication.

(7) Incorporate ethnic and cross-cultural diversity in the curriculum

The Government strives to build Hong Kong to become a cosmopolitan city. South Asian Hongkongers are entitled to be viewed as part of this achievement. In our school curriculum, the cultures of different ethnic groups living in Hong Kong should be introduced. For example, images of people of different ethnicities and races making up the Hong Kong society ought to be represented in textbooks so as to fully embrace these groups as part of Hong Kong.

(8) Improve educational opportunities for South Asians

Improvement has already been implemented that ethnic minority students can apply for university programs under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) route, based on the results of British General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Chinese) Examination. However, it seems that many faculties in universities and colleges are still sticking to stringent Chinese admission requirement. As a lot of courses in various universities in Hong Kong are taught in English, the Chinese language requirement should flexibly be relaxed in the admission for South Asians. In addition, there should be more varieties in vocational and re-employment training courses for non-Chinese speaking groups.

Social interactions

(9) Encourage ethnic minorities and Chinese to participate in cross-cultural activities

Programs offered by NGOs are generally culturally homogeneous – they are either targeted at Chinese or South Asian participants. Programs that are designed for both groups to jointly participate are still rare. NGOs should be encouraged to organize longer-duration programs for Chinese and South Asians to participate together. Furthermore, the vast majority of notices and publicity of events organized at the district or community levels are in Chinese. To encourage South Asian Hongkongers to take part in these events, publicity should also be given in English.

(10) Promote the benefits of a culturally diverse society

The Government should exert greater efforts and take the lead in collaboration with ethnic groups, private sector and NGOs, in a bid to promote the benefits of a culturally diverse society through sustained public campaigns, in which South Asians and other ethnic minorities are represented.

(11) Increase community resources to enhance social inclusion and understanding

South Asians, especially those educated here or have been living in Hong Kong for a long time, understand Chinese culture in various degrees. However, South Asian cultures are not known to most Chinese. Resources can be allocated to introduce South Asian cultures at a community level, particularly in areas and housing estates where South Asians reside in greater number or density. Furthermore, NGOs can, as a first step, promote cultural understanding by offering interest classes such as cooking ethnic food, making ethnic jewelry or other accessories, as well as cultural presentations such as music and dance. Such classes could also be used as a venue to promote inter-cultural interactions.

(12) Increase public visibility of ethnic minorities

South Asians are not usually represented in the local mass media. Many South Asians who were born and educated in Hong Kong speak Cantonese like any other Chinese born and educated in local Chinese schools. Yet, they are disproportionately under-represented as public figures. It is only until very recently that we see more faces of South Asians on TV. Increasing the visibility of South Asians in the mass media could help instill the idea of South Asians as part of Hong Kong community.

Provision of goods, services and facilities

(13) Educate providers of goods, services and facilities with cultural sensitivity to ethnic minorities

More publicity programmes should be formulated for providers of goods, services and facilities so as to elevate their sensitivity of cultural differences of South Asians and alleviate discrimination. For example, South Asians should not be denied of services in restaurants and shops. When opening a personal bank account and getting a credit card, South Asians should be treated the same as other ethnic groups. Real estate agents should not discriminate South Asians in the rental of a residential flat and commercial office.