

Hidden from public view: The experience

Suresh Grover, Director of The Monitoring Group, UK's leading anti-Chair of Min Quan, a Chinese-led project of The Monitoring Group¹

In this article, the authors describe the experience of Chinese communities in Britain, focusing on migration, the catering sector and racism.

The 2001 British census shows that the British Chinese community constitutes approximately 0.5% of the population, numbering just over 250,000. However, given the inflow of new migrants over the last decade, a more accurate estimate is in the region of half a million. The census also shows that over 70% of the Chinese people in the UK are self-employed, the vast majority of whom are based in the catering or associated industries. This statistic is usually cited as an indicator of a self-reliant, insular and hard-to-reach community.

Migration

Migration plays an integral part in the British Chinese community whether it is for economic or social reasons. This decade began with the tragic death of 58 Chinese migrants, found suffocating in the back of a lorry while attempting to enter the UK. The intervening years have proved to be equally challenging, due to numerous changes in immigration laws and Government policy. Coupled with the growth of racism and the latest economic crisis, they pose a disturbing and dangerous trend and new challenges for civil society.

The first big wave of Chinese migrants arrived in the UK during the 1st World War, in April 1917. They were recruited on low wages, from the Shandong province in China, to support British soldiers fighting on the "Western Front". The initial contingent numbered just over a thousand but grew hundred fold in a couple of years and were the largest migrant group in the country during this period that included Indians, black South Africans, Egyptians and West Indians. However unlike other migrants the Chinese were subject to martial law and thus in 1920, over 95% were repatriated back to China.

Permanent settlement of Chinese people into the UK began at the end of the 2nd World War, mainly from countries that were either colonies or ex-colonies such as Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. A combination of factors connected with the post-war economic boom in the West and the circumstances relating to the civil war in China pushed Chinese migrants from Hong Kong's New Territories towards the UK, and led to the creation of a new sector in the catering industry.

A further group of Chinese migrants, mainly students, arrived in the late 60's. During that period, both Hong Kong and Malaysia experienced anti-Chinese riots. The 1967 riots in Hong Kong created a new mindset for many Chinese parents who began to plan settlement outside by sending their children to study abroad. Malaysia posed a deeper problem as the Government imposed a so-called positive discrimination policy for indigenous Malaya's but its effect was to discriminate against the Chinese and Indian minorities. Moreover the implementation of this policy was

sometimes accompanied by anti-minority rhetoric that often led to large-scale violence, such as the anti-Chinese riots in 1969.

The war between China and Vietnam in 1989, apparently prompted by the expulsion of Chinese refugees, created another wave of Chinese migrants to the UK and Europe. In Britain, the increase in new Chinese labour not only allowed the Chinese catering industry to expand dramatically, it also created new markets, especially within the clothing sector, in which the new Vietnamese Chinese used their skills to open small cloth making factories in large cities such as London.

The Chinese catering sector

Despite its expansion, the Chinese catering sector, as the main employer of Chinese people in the UK, has continued to suffer from twin problems of labour shortage and upgrading of skills. Employers usually resolved this problem by recruiting skilled labour from overseas. This practice is now under threat, with grave consequences for the Chinese communities, from the Government's new set of policies that include imposing draconian civil penalties on employers of undocumented workers as well as establishing a new points-based system that governs the way in which people, other than visitors, may enter the UK. The latter impacts on the Chinese catering industry's ability to survive and expand by having a realistic opportunity to recruit chefs from overseas who have the necessary skills required in this industry. Many Chinese-owned businesses are now facing closure in an already difficult economic climate. Restaurant owners and customers in London's Chinatown have also complained of heavy-handed tactics in many high profile raids, including the use of armed policeman and the presence of news television crews. This has bred distrust between the British Chinese community and the authorities and led to the first ever strike, last year, by all restaurant owners and staff in Chinatown who closed their businesses for half a day to protest against government policies.

Racism and rights

The British Chinese community is constantly stereotyped. On the one hand, they are presented as members of "triads" or mass victims of gangs and gang-masters. On the other, they are presented as so-called positive role models, as high achievers in business or academia. These crude generalisations have been doubly debilitating for the Chinese community in the UK. Apart from their inherent inaccuracy, they have obscured from public view the extent of racism directed against people of Chinese origin. There is an established myth that the Chinese are a satisfied community that is immune from racism. In truth, this is far from being the case.

Last year The Monitoring Group launched "Hidden from Public View", a commissioned study conducted by independent researchers and academics. It is the first effort to comprehensively examine the extent of the problem. The report reveals that the UK Chinese community faces unacceptable levels of racism in a very wide variety of locations: in homes, on the street and in the workplace. Even more disturbing, it shows that there is an ongoing cycle of neglect on the part of authorities and a reaction of increased mistrust on the part of the UK Chinese community.

¹ For further information on the work of The Monitoring Group or Min Quan please visit www.tmg-uk.org or email sgrover@tmg-uk.org.

of Chinese communities in Britain

racist casework led civil rights group, and Bobby Chan,

Mr. Chung's story

On 10 January 2010, Chinese takeaway owner Mr. Sui Chung was beaten up by six white youths in a racist attack. The 53-year-old dad of three suffered a broken arm and wrist and bruising to his face, which left his eye swollen, after challenging their racist abuse outside Clifton Chinese Takeaway, Nottingham. He spent two nights in the Queen's Medical Centre receiving treatment for his injuries. It was not the first race-hate crime he had endured since opening his takeaway 14 years ago. "They challenge me every day," he said. "Sometimes as many as 30 youths. They are aged 15 or 16, with some younger. This has been going on a long time."



Mr. Chung's daughter, Gar Wai Chung, 21, said she was unhappy with how police dealt with the attack on her father. "The police attitude is hideous," she said. "They did not come to the takeaway, where they may have got a glimpse of the youths that did this."

The Monitoring Group and Min Quan are helping and supporting the family at the moment.

Police and local authorities are often reluctant to term attacks against people of Chinese origin as racist, or investigate them in a satisfying manner. Consequently, these crimes are under-reported because the Chinese community does not feel able to bring the matter to the authorities. All of this "hides" the experience of racism from the larger public. Nevertheless, the impact on those affected is extremely significant and points to a pattern of eroding trust between the UK Chinese community and other communities in UK. It is not yet clear how the new Government will respond to the urgent recommendations made by the authors of the report.

Even where public authorities are committed to tackling racial attacks the report suggests that standard one-size-fits-all measures and programmes are proving ineffective. Policies geared towards addressing the racism faced by the UK Chinese must be carefully tailored to the needs of the community. Chinese civil society organisations, which could help bridge the widening divide between the authorities and the Chinese community, are not considered important intermediaries in the present policy perspective. As a result, they rarely have the required funding, facilities and training to deal with problems related to hate crimes.

More specifically the report found that:

(a) An alarming proportion of people of Chinese origin are victimized:

- Between one-fifth and one-sixth of the UK Chinese population has experienced racial harassment or violence. This is a higher proportion than the figure for any other ethnic minority in England.
- Owners of takeaways and restaurants are among the groups of UK Chinese most vulnerable to attacks. However, they are by no means the only victims of racial violence.

- Chinese students, of both sexes, are another particularly vulnerable group.
- Chinese people between the ages of 16-30 were more likely to face racial violence than other groups.

(b) Attacks range from verbal abuse to serious assault and repeat victimisation is common:

- The survey revealed that almost 71% of respondents who said they had been targeted because they were Chinese had been subjected to verbal abuse. Comments such as "Chinky", "Chink" and "yellow" were common. Verbal abuse occurred in many different locations - from walking down the street to places of work.
- Women and students, in particular, were statistically more likely to be targeted for verbal abuse.
- Damage to businesses (41% of affected respondents) and refusal to pay (24% of affected respondents) were also very common.
- In 34% of cases vehicles were damaged and in 22% of cases homes were damaged.
- Threats, physical attacks, burglary and thefts were reported in 10-20% of cases where racist incidents had occurred.
- Repeat victimisation is a common occurrence. More than two-thirds had been victimised more than once. Almost one-third of those who had experienced incidents had been victimised more than 3 times. While most repeat incidents were verbal abuse, damage to property or home were also commonly repeated.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents had made changes to their lives because of racist incidents. In depth interviews revealed that the psychological wellbeing of a large number of victims was affected. Persistent fear, anger and worry were routinely reported.

(c) The Chinese community has very low confidence in the authorities:

- 36% of respondents who had faced racial attacks did not report them to the police. Most did not do so because they felt that the police would not do anything. Almost as many thought that the incident was not significant.
- Over 60% of those who had reported incidents to the police were dissatisfied with the police response. The percentages were even higher in the London (83%) and North Western regions (78%).
- Problems in communicating incidents to the police were often due to the lack of interpretation services.
- In-depth interviews with over 60 respondents who had experienced racism revealed that there were a variety of causes for this mistrust. Most common amongst these was the lack of follow-up of their complaint. But there was also a perception that police were reluctant to actively pursue prosecutions. Only two cases were successfully prosecuted.
- Secondary victimisation - victimisation as a consequence of the response of institutions and individuals to the victim during and after the original incident - was evident in a number of cases by police as well as local authority social services.

(Continues on page 16)

(Continued from page 15)

7. The concept of “forgotten minorities” entails a subsequent question with regard to measuring the specific discrimination faced by particular vulnerable groups. In this sense, do you think the collection of ethnic data could be an adequate legal tool?

E. Bianchi: The collection of data on ethnic minorities and their every-day experiences is a crucial tool in the fight against racism and xenophobia, as such data allows us to gain a better understanding on the situation on the ground and to develop more effective policies against these phenomena. In this regard it is necessary to make a difference between the collection of anonymous data on the situation of ethnic minorities, which do not allow revealing the identity of data subjects, and the collection of personal data revealing person’s racial or ethnic origin. As long as the data is anonymous, its collection would not pose problems from the point of view of EU data protection legislation. These issues may of course also be covered by national legislation, and it is not the job of the European Commission to comment on these.

P. Lozès: Ethnic statistics exist in a number of countries. Their aim is not to biologically categorise people, but to measure discrimination in order to better address it. Demographers don’t make judgments on “race” or “ethnicity” and don’t make any ontological assertions as to their consistency; the latter are only used to take actions against specific harmful effects. These statistics are anonymous, voluntary, self-declaratory and are not used for data-mining: they aim to measure discrimination, not to identify individuals.

(Continued from page 9)

- The interviews as well as some of the cases taken on by The Monitoring Group suggest that in a small percentage of cases police officers are also perpetrators of racism.

Unless the Chinese community finds new ways to build strategic alliances with others there is little hope it will influence Government policy alone. Geographically it is too dispersed and heterogeneous and not sufficiently concentrated in any locality to make any electoral impact. However there is little doubt that it is a community in transition; its form and size is rapidly changing and many within it are developing new forms of political, cultural and social actions and raising serious concerns linked to political representation. A new group of Chinese migrants - students and academics from Mainland China and other South East Asian countries - bring with them new expectations. Early signs indicate that they will not tolerate prejudice and discrimination and are willing to organise with other more settled sections of the community to raise the alarm. The dynamic of change however will remain incomplete unless British society can respond positively to the misery suffered by undocumented workers, mainly from Fujian, who have landed on the shores of Britain as economic migrants or asylum seekers. Their current experience of Britain can be both bleak and dangerous, as they seem destined to remain vulnerable to imprisonment, robbery, violence and even death. To enhance its economic stability, ensure safety for its numbers and advance political influence, the Chinese community in Britain has little choice but to tear the social and political fabric that hides it from public view. As a first step, all it has to do is to become visible.

Announcements

- ENAR published a report entitled “Target-setting for improving the socio-economic situation of migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe”. It is available at: www.enar-eu.org/Page.asp?docid=15845&langue=EN
- ENAR responded to two European Commission consultations, on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and violence. The responses are available at www.enar-eu.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=15288&langue=EN
- ENAR issued a fact sheet, in cooperation with the Equal Rights Trust, on the Single Equality Act in Britain, available at www.enar-eu.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=15289&langue=EN
- Sign the petition calling for the ratification of the UN Migrant Workers Convention by the 27 EU Member States at www.migrantsconvention.eu

ENAR

European network against racism



60 Rue Gallait, 3rd Floor, B-1030 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32-2-229.35.70 , Fax: +32-2-229.35.75
E-mail: info@enar-eu.org
Web: www.enar-eu.org

Sign up to ENAR’s Mailing List: www.enar-eu.org

ENAR is a network of European NGOs working to combat racism in all EU member states. Its establishment was a major outcome of the 1997 European Year Against Racism. ENAR aims to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals, and to link local/regional/national initiatives with European initiatives. ENAR’s vision is of a world free from racism.



This newsletter is supported by the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013). This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>

The information contained in this newsletter does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of ENAR or of the European Commission.

Responsible for publication: Michaël Privot

Editor: Georgina Siklossy

Translators: D. Barbier, G. de Séjournet and H. Stacey