

# **Nottingham's Chinese Community in Transition:**

## *A survey of community cohesion, integration and university engagement*

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### **Executive Summary**

The globalisation of higher education has had profound impact on local economies and cultures. This is particularly seen in the case of Chinese students and Chinese communities in the UK. The number of Chinese students has increased six-fold from 2001 to 2011 while the local Chinese population in university towns or boroughs is double of that in non-university counterparts. Despite this quantitative growth, little is known about the social lives of Chinese students and their links with local societies including Chinese communities.

With a focus on the links and the potential of university students engaging with the local Chinese community, a pilot project was undertaken in Nottingham through a joint effort by the University of Nottingham and local stakeholders. It provided a basis for a robust survey to be carried out to understand the latest developments in the local Chinese community and the needs of local residents. Drawing from a Chinese community survey conducted by Nottingham City Council in 2002, a new survey was initiated by a meeting of the Nottingham Chinese Community Forum, which was financially supported by the University of Nottingham and its School of Contemporary Chinese Studies.

The overall aim of this survey is to reveal changes in Nottingham's Chinese community over the last decade and the role of universities in promoting Chinese community cohesion and integration. In particular, it addresses issues including 1) major changes since 2002 in both quantitative (population growth) and qualitative (structural adjustment) terms; 2) the contribution of Chinese students and their specific impact on local communities; 3) the variety of needs for and perceptions towards Chinese community cohesion and integration; 4) communication and social contact between different groups within and beyond the Chinese community; 5) policy recommendations for universities and stakeholders to work together for multiple benefits including student development, community cohesion and integration.

Based on multiple stakeholders' participation and support, a mixed methodology was adopted in the design and conduct of two interwoven questionnaire survey for both local residents and Chinese students respectively. For the former, visits with the Chinese community, business observations, focus group meetings and individual interviews were used in developing, testing and disseminating questionnaires while an online survey was used as a main channel for disseminating and collecting questionnaires amongst Chinese students. The surveys were designed and conducted in Nottingham from May to July 2013. Fieldwork lasted three months from May to June 2013 in Nottingham and involved around 700 people, leading to a total of 311 valid questionnaires collected which covered a wide range of people and groups in terms of dialect, occupation, identity of sending countries and regions across the Nottingham area (including Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire). However, we do not claim that the samples can represent all groups within the Nottingham Chinese community and there is a sample bias for over accounting new immigrants who are either highly skilled or family business owners from mainland China and under accounting of Chinese migrant workers and Cantonese speakers as well.

The latest UK Census suggests that by 2011 there were 8930 Chinese living in the Nottingham area of which two thirds reside in Nottingham City. Compared with 2001, the Chinese population has more than doubled and tripled respectively. As a result, the share of the Chinese in the total population has increased from 0.37% and 0.64% to 0.82% and 1.96% respectively-higher than the national average of 0.72%. To some extent, the growth and distribution of the Chinese population in Nottingham in the last decade are representative of the large number of local Chinese communities in England outside a few metropolitan municipals (e.g. London, Birmingham, Manchester).

The rapid growth of the Chinese population in the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City areas in particular has mainly been caused by the internationalisation of higher education, leading to a more than eight-fold growth of Chinese students in the two universities--the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University--in the last decade. Taking into account that most Chinese students living in Nottingham City do not participate in the national census and the large number of Chinese exchange students/scholars excluded from the statistics of the High Education Statistical Agency (HESA), the total Chinese population in Nottingham City is likely to have been over 10,000 by 2011 of which more than 40% were Chinese students.

Bringing together the two groups of Chinese students and local residents, our questionnaire survey shows that 70% of respondents originated from mainland China while the remaining 30% is made up of people from other countries or regions such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, and Chinese who are British-born. Furthermore, nearly two thirds of respondents are female while samples from students and local residents share a similar distribution in terms of region of origin and gender. Major differences between local residents and students, however, are seen in the distribution of age groups and the period of time these people have lived in the UK and Nottingham. For the age grouping, a normal distribution can be found in local residents. By contrast, three quarters of students are in the group of 18-24 years old. Amongst local residents, the mean lengths of stay in the UK and Nottingham are 14 and 10 years respectively compared with 2.3 and 1.7 years respectively for the Chinese students.

In comparison with results from the previous survey in 2002, major changes in Nottingham's Chinese community can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, Mandarin has replaced Cantonese as the dominant language used within the Chinese community. Secondly, there has been a significant improvement in terms of their command of English (spoken, reading and writing) amongst those whose native language is not English. Thirdly, there has been a decline of traditional Chinese community organisations due to the rapid growth of new immigration from China on the one hand, and the increasing impact of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) and the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies (SCCS) on the other. Against this background, the Nottingham Chinese community can be characterised as fragmented with low level integration due to a lack of common interests with low-level participation in major events within the local Chinese and mainstream communities.

Amongst local residents, 63% are married and 12% are single, leaving one quarter with missing information in this respect. Furthermore, three quarters of respondents live with their families and 10% with elderly people while the mean size of surveyed households is 3.4 persons. In addition about 70% of respondents have properties that have 3.3 bedrooms on average in Nottingham. One salient characteristic amongst local resident respondents is 45% of them have a university degree or higher education qualifications and nearly one quarter have vocational (or college) training experience. Regarding the employment status of respondents, about two thirds of samples have a

full-time or part-time job while 20% are housewives. In terms of distribution of samples by sector, the largest is family business, accounting for 35%, followed by the private and public sectors which make up 27% and 23% respectively.

The poor status of Chinese community cohesion and integration can be understood through observing and measuring the scope and frequency of social contacts and networking amongst local resident respondents within or across group boundaries distinguished by dialect, occupation, identity (e.g. Chinese from mainland China and Hong Kong) and culture (Chinese vs non-Chinese). Our survey shows that the Chinese community is rather diverse in terms of social contact and few of them socialise beyond their dialect and occupation groups. Significant differences can be seen between those from mainland China and from other countries or regions. Within the former group there are more people of similar dialect groups with similar occupational backgrounds. Within the latter group people are found to be more open or good at communication with non-Chinese or people from other ethnic groups.

As to what local resident respondents need, either for themselves or their families, knowledge of the local educational, social and legal systems was ranked highest, accounting for over 40% of samples, followed by their need for English-Chinese translation, access to the NHS and skills training. In relation to their children, Mandarin learning and Chinese cultural interests were major concerns, followed by special courses for learning the Chinese culture.

Moving on to Chinese students respondents, one major focus was their social life on campus and in Nottingham. Above half of the surveyed students rent a house with other students off campus while 46% live in university accommodation. Furthermore, 40% live in neighbourhoods where there are Chinese students of the same identity. One quarter of them live amongst international and local students while 10% live with Chinese neighbours who are of different identities. Regarding social networks on campus, different patterns can be seen between Chinese students from mainland China and those from other countries or regions. The former group is overwhelmingly dominated by those with the same background (identity) – students from mainland China -- while the latter group takes a balanced approach towards all groups in general and gives more weight to international students than those of the same background. As a result, the latter is more open and socialises with different groups on campus compared to their counterparts from mainland China.

An index for community cohesion and integration can be developed based on social contact and friendship within and across group boundaries. For the group of other Chinese this is significantly higher in terms of the scope and frequency of their social contacts compared to that for the group from mainland China in terms of not only on-campus but also local Chinese and non-Chinese communities.

In connection with social networking with local communities, about 40% of respondents have had working experience, of which 40% were paid and over half were voluntary. With a focus on those with voluntary working experience, their schools were listed as top in terms of sources of voluntary job information, accounting for three quarters of all cases, followed by the Student Voluntary Centre and student societies. Regarding the impact of student work experience on their career plan in the near future, over one third of respondents selected to go home while a quarter planned to further their studies and another quarter planned to look for a job opportunity in the UK. In addition, the variety of career plans is closely related to their region of origin and work experience as well. Students from mainland China and those with no work experience are more likely to opt to continue to study in the UK or to go home directly, while students from outside of mainland China or those with work experience are more interested in finding a job in the UK.

Regarding key issues to be addressed in the near future, there is a common need amongst both local residents and students' respondents for access to and the sharing of Chinese community information. However, there are significant differences between local residents and students in terms of which needs come first. For local residents, access to the NHS and representative voices on local councils are listed as top priorities. By contrast, students pay more attention to work opportunities in NGOs and communication with local British residents. Despite the aforementioned difference, both students and local residents expressed a strong desire to enhance collaboration between the universities and the local Chinese community. Furthermore, more than half of them have provided their personal contact details to receive further information and to be involved in Chinese community projects in the near future.

A number of survey findings and conclusions can be drawn against the research aims and objectives:

- The Chinese community in Nottingham and Nottingham City in particular has been experiencing a fast growth of population and structural adjustment in the last decade or so
- Driven by the internationalisation of higher education, Chinese students have become an important part of the Chinese community in both their needs for and support of the local community
- The Nottingham Chinese community is divided into many small groups and there is a lack of communication, interaction and cooperation amongst them -- a challenge and dilemma hindering community cohesion which has negative impact on the integration
- Different groups are different in terms of their attitudes and activities towards community cohesion and integration
- New momentum can be found amongst Chinese students and in particular those from outside mainland China while the socialisation of new immigrants from mainland China are more closed and homogeneous
- Promoting Chinese community cohesion and integration calls for the development and innovation of Chinese community organisations, in which universities can play more positive roles in terms of providing information, resources and coordination services for all Chinese groups
- A number of priority areas have been identified by respondents--communication and information shared between different Chinese groups, voluntary work opportunities for students to engage local stakeholders in Chinese community projects and Chinese language and cultural promotion

Based upon the above research findings, a number of policy recommendations are provided by this report:

- Create a Nottingham Community Innovation Park (NCIP) to bring together universities, local councils, civil society organisations and ethnic communities for community cohesion and integration
- Establish a Nottingham Community Innovation Committee (NCIC) for NCIP project coordination and also continue running the Nottingham Chinese Community Forum--a regular meeting for Chinese community affairs
- Create a new Nottingham Chinese Community Centre (NCCC) to support or foster local Chinese language schools, voluntary students and other relevant projects
- Encourage relevant schools and university staff to be involved in local and Chinese community projects as a part of research development and curriculum reform
- Conduct a pilot project for new mechanisms in recruiting and managing voluntary students to engage with Chinese community cohesion and integration projects