

# NORTH EAST

## **RACE EQUALITY FORUM**

# RESEARCH BRIEFING

## No. 1



### ***The Chinese population in the North East Region***

***A NEW REPORT FROM THE North East 'Race', Crime and Justice Research Network (covering all five universities in the region), examines the social and economic issues facing the Chinese population within the region. The research was undertaken by Dr Zhifeng Tong from Hangzhou (near Shanghai) working with Professors Gary Craig and Maggie O'Neill at the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University.***

**Key highlights include the following:**

- The Chinese population in the UK is one of the largest (at around 400,000 people) and is the only minority ethnic group settled in every local authority area within the UK, including the more rural and remote areas. In those areas, the small Chinese population (often based around food production and retailing) may feel very vulnerable and unsupported, despite the continuing popularity of Chinese cuisine
- The Chinese population is diverse, covering ethnically Chinese people from the People's Republic (mainland China), Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore, and others. These are all represented in the region.
- Although some Chinese origin people arrived some time ago (in many cases in the mid-nineteenth century), connected with merchant shipping in particular (doing the dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs below decks including cooking, cleaning and stoking boilers), most Chinese immigration has occurred in the past thirty years with the population doubling since 2001. There are about 15,000 Chinese origin people within the North East, many of them UK citizens of many years standing.
- The predominant group has been Hong Kong Chinese, who largely manage the catering and fast food outlets across the region, until recently when a relatively large number of Chinese students arrived to study at the region's universities for 1-3 years. Students contribute very substantially through their fees to the regional economy and through their purchasing power; in addition they often stay to work for a year or two.

- Chinese people can again be found in virtually every part of the region, including very rural areas. There are very few electoral wards without Chinese origin residents.
- Chinese residents have a mixed impression of life in the region and experience of accessing services. Although many declare themselves content with police, education and health services for example, many have negative impressions and Chinese people are subject to high levels of racism, discrimination and racist abuse. Seventy per cent of those interviewed said that reports to the police were not followed up. The Chinese population arriving in the 1970s is now ageing and will be in need of culturally-sensitive social and health care services.
- Because Chinese people find it difficult to build bridges with local residents, many feel socially excluded and their perceptions and needs remain 'invisible'. Mainstream services do not reach out to Chinese populations and as a result their needs often remain unrecognised and unmet: services thus contribute to 'invisibilising' the Chinese population. There remains little provision for teaching English for example although some Chinese community organisations have done work in this area.
- Chinese students, mostly from the People's Republic of China, have little connection with the longer-established Chinese communities and this difficulty is exacerbated both by the fact that they are often only in the region for a few years whilst studying and by different linguistic traditions. Those speaking Cantonese may not speak Mandarin and vice versa.
- The Chinese population makes an enormous contribution to the region, which is also often unrecognised. This goes way beyond fast food outlets and restaurants, and the 400+ Chinese-owned enterprises in the region include Chinese medical practices, businesses of various kinds including retail outlets, and church-based enterprises. This is the largest concentration of Chinese-owned businesses outside London and makes a contribution to the regional economy of around £60M to £70M per year.



**Contact:** For further information about the research report *The Chinese Population in the North East Region*, or to obtain a copy, please contact [gary.craig@galtres8.co.uk](mailto:gary.craig@galtres8.co.uk)

*The North East Race Equality Forum is a Network of around 300 individuals and organisations in the North East Region committed to promoting racial equality in the context of social justice. No one organisation is necessarily committed to every idea published in the name of the Forum. The Forum is supported by the 'Race', Crime and Justice Regional Research Network, which includes researchers from each University in the region.*