Exploring Racial Experiences of International Students in a Chinese Context

Miron Bhowmik[1] & Sohana Wadud Ahmad
The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China

Abstract: This paper provides an in-depth account of lived racial experiences faced by a group of international students in Hong Kong and how such experiences affected their academic, social, and mental well-being. Using neoracism as a theoretical lens and drawing on in-depth interviews with 10 international students, we found that most of our participants encountered subtle forms of racism inside campus while the experiences of racism outside campus were explicit. Participants were ostracized and felt lonely, helpless, and stressed out, which propelled them to adapt some coping mechanisms to survive the remaining study years and return to their homeland. Given the recent push towards internationalization of higher education by Hong Kong government, the findings of the study will help academics, support staff, leaders and policy makers undertake measures for creating a positive racial climate to attract more international students and provide them meaningful international education experiences.
Keywords: Racial experiences, culture, ethnicity, well-being, international students, higher education, Hong Kong

Introduction

International students encounter several challenges including 'academic adaptation, sociocultural adjustment, culture shock, language difficulties, misunderstandings in intercultural communication, social isolation, loneliness,' and identity crises (Sung, 2022, p. 640). Often such experiences are linked to racial encounters and students' racial experiences negatively affect their academic, social and mental well-being (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Hurtado et al., 1998; Tausen et al., 2020). To address these challenges educational institutions in many parts of the world are reforming their policies to promote positive racial climate on campus (Gao & Liu, 2021).

Internationalization in recent times has led to the surge of international students in Asian universities. More specifically, China has become a popular international higher education destination through constant push towards internationalization and its link with economic development (Gao, 2024; Gao & Hua, 2021). Most of the related research on international students' experiences, however, is based on the US, the UK, Canada and Australian higher education contexts. There is a research gap in Asia, more specifically in Chinese higher education context where little is known about international students' racial experiences.

Studies have so far framed various problems faced by international students and highlighted their inability to cope and adapt. Often the onus is on the international students to blend into the host country, know its culture, norms, and overcome the challenges individually (Hoang & Jordan, 2019; Lee, 2006). Few studies rarely focused on how both personnel and structure can create and

---

[1] Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Department of Education Policy and Leadership, Centre for Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China. Email: mbhowmik@eduhk.hk

maintain a racist, discriminatory campus environment for international students causing them to suffer silently and at the same time putting primary burden on them to navigate through these barriers.

This paper reports an in-depth account of lived racial experiences and their effects faced by a group of international students in Hong Kong. It specifically answers the following two research questions: *(1) What racial experiences were faced by a group of international students during their studies in Hong Kong? (2) How did the experiences affect their academic, social, and mental well-being?* By answering these questions, the paper contributes to the scant literature on international students' racial experiences in Hong Kong, a Chinese context.

Given the increased mobility of international students and the recent push towards internationalization of higher education by the administration of Hong Kong, it is important to explore the racial experiences of international students to understand the intricacies of those experiences and how their well-being is affected to help them overcome the challenges and navigate their international education with a positive mind set. The in-depth lived experiences of international students, as reported in this research, will help Hong Kong academics, support staff, leaders, and policy makers to undertake measures for creating a positive racial climate to attract more international students and provide them meaningful international education experiences which will ultimately strengthen the internationalization of higher education in Hong Kong.

International students' racial experiences

International Students experiencing racism, discrimination and racial microaggression have been highlighted in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and others (Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, C., 2017; Lee, J. S., 2017). Experiences of international students tend to be generalized or stereotyped based on their nationality, ethnicity, and religion (Jones, 2017) disregarding the fact that different students might have different stories to tell. A discrepancy is reported between their own views of themselves and how they are perceived by the local students which negatively impacts their satisfaction with international education experiences (Brown & Brown, 2013; Jones, 2017; Li & Han, 2021).

Research focusing on the US higher educational institutions revealed international students being discriminated based on culture, nationality, English speaking accent, food choices, religion, hairstyle/dressing sense etc. Verbal and nonverbal insults towards international students were reported by Lee and Rice (2007). Various racial experiences alienated international students from local students in the US, made them feel isolated and lonely, and they started to think of themselves as outsiders and not part of the local students (Yao et al., 2021). Identity crisis challenges were also experienced by international students while trying to reconcile their pre-US identities with current identities of the local culture as a minority, leading them to understand how far they were discriminated (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017). In comparison, international students from western English-speaking nations did not face such challenges (Bordoloi, 2014; James, 2018; Koo, Kim et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2019).

After the 9/11 attack international students, specifically Muslim, from Middle East, Asia and Africa started perceiving more discrimination compared to other non-Muslim international students (Boafo-Arthur,2014; Lobnibe, 2013; Lee & Rice, 2007). Similar situation was faced by Oriental students during the pandemic indicating a hostile environment for international students in the US (Schumaker, 2020). More recent studies found racial challenges of being ignored, negative campus environment and isolation were faced more by non-White international students in White dominated higher education institutions in the US (Halpern & Aydin, 2021; Koo, Kim, et

al., 2021; Talley-Matthews et al., 2020). International students in the UK and Australia reported being highly susceptible to racist abuse if they are physically distinct from the host community (Marginson et al., 2010). In addition, Blacks and Asians were more prone to experience discrimination in the UK based on their country of origin, outlook, and culture (Brown & Jones, 2013).

Gong et al. (2021) found that a group of students from New Zealand in China faced challenges with local students in terms of communication, adapting to local culture, and misunderstandings; and responding by learning to understand more of the local values/norms while avoiding conflicts. In Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, studies have reported various challenges faced by international students including language barrier, cultural shock, misunderstanding due to communication barriers with local students, academic adaptation, social isolation, loneliness, financial challenge, stereotypes, and identity crisis (e.g., Cheung, 2013; Ladegaard & Cheng, 2014; Sung, 2017, 2021, 2022; Yu & Wright, 2017; Wu et al., 2015). However, how these experiences are linked to racism, other racial experiences and their effects on well-being have been little reported.

Internationalization of higher education in Hong Kong

Realizing the importance of promoting internationalization of higher education, supportive educational policy reforms were undertaken in Hong Kong (Vyas, 2018). The past two decades saw policies encouraging greater internationalization of Hong Kong's universities by increasing the enrollment of non-local students (University Grants Committee [UGC], 1996, 2004), lifting quota for enrolling international students, relaxing restrictions on entry visas and employment policies for non-local students (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2017a, 2017b). Furthermore, several scholarships and awards such as the HKSAR Government Scholarship and the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Schemes are offered by the HKSAR Government for non-local students (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2017c). Being referred as "Asia's World City", consisting of a unique cultural and geographical position, Hong Kong acts as the bridge between the East and the West. Mok et al., (2021, p.4) put it, 'as an educational hub, the academic reputation and quality of Hong Kong is another motivation for students to choose it as the destination' for higher education.

There were 21,709 non-local students studying in eight publicly funded Hong Kong universities in 2022/23, constituting 21.2% of total student population (Census and Statistics Department, 2023). Among them 74.8% were from Mainland China, 21.6% from other Asian countries and 3.7% from the rest of the world. Thus, Hong Kong's version of 'international students' referring to 'non-local students' include two-third from Mainland China and one-third from other countries in the world.   The recent increase of international students' enrolment cap from 20% to 40% from the academic year 2024/25 (Yiu, 2023), indicating HKSAR's determination towards internationalization of higher education is further solidified. As quoted by Yiu (2023) in the South China Morning Post, "The initiative is against the backdrop of the [government] blueprint of turning Hong Kong into a regional education hub and the policy of attracting talent globally". Furthermore, educational institutions are reforming their policies to promote a favorable environment owing to the current presence of a diverse student population in Hong Kong (Gao & Liu, 2021). Therefore, issues related to racial experiences, especially on campus, need to be tackled as the Hong Kong Government aims for further internationalization of higher education and attracting global talents.

According to the Census and Statistics Department (2022), Hong Kong has a total of 619568 ethnic minorities (officially defined as non-Chinese population), constituting 8.4% of the

total population. Considerable evidence indicates that racism and discrimination prevail against ethnic minorities in Hong Kong (Bhowmik & Gube, 2022). It was also reported that racism is an acculturation challenge which causes stress among ethnic minorities youth in Hong Kong (Bhowmik et al., 2018; Bhowmik, 2021). However, is the situation similar in the case of international students especially those from non-Chinese backgrounds? The current study attempts to answer this question.

Theoretical framework: Neoracism

The study reported here is grounded on the lived racial experiences of international students, and the encounters of discrimination are framed within the circle of direct and indirect forms of neoracism. Spears (1999, p. 12-13) defines, "neo-racism rationalizes the subordination of people of color based on culture, which is, of course, acquired through acculturation within an ethnic group, while traditional racism rationalizes it fundamentally in terms of biology. Neo-racism is still racism in that it functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression." This means neoracism justifies racism based on cultural difference or national origin of a minority group not only limiting to difference in physical characteristics such as skin color and focuses on preserving dominant group's privilege (Lee, 2006; Mitchell & Maloff, 2016). Furthermore, Balibar (1991) extends the interpretation beyond biology and phenotype to include common cultural characteristics, ranging from dress, rituals, language to values and religious beliefs and practices. Thus, the phenomenon of neoracism is also called "cultural racism" or "racism of cultural difference" or "cultural stereotypes" – explaining discrimination based on cultural difference or country of origin rather than physical appearance alone (Koo et al., 2023). It is plausible that international students might not necessarily connect their racial experience with only race but also with culture (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Neoracism therefore is applied in this study to interpret international students' racial experiences on campus due to their diverse culture and national origin. Most of the research in the context of neoracism was based on American higher educational institutions (e.g., Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Dengg, 2022; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee & Opio, 2011; Yao, 2018). Findings showed discriminatory attitudes by domestic students prevail towards international students such as Southeast Asians and Africans based on nationality, language, and cultural practices (Koo et al., 2023) - which can be linked to neoracism. However, there is scarcity of research adopting neoracism to study racial experiences of international students in Hong Kong educational institutions. This research is responding to this gap.

Being a British colony for 156 years and now under China's increasing geo-political control, racism in Hong Kong has a distinctive characteristic. Colonialism itself was a manifestation of racism which oppressed both Chinese and Ethnic minorities of South and South-East Asian heritages. The ethnic minorities have been living in Hong Kong since the 1840s. Even after the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, the South and South-East Asians continued to endure discrimination (Law & Lee, 2012). Cultural racism is one of the forms reported in Hong Kong that stereotypes all Chinese as 'hard working' and South Asian ethnic minorities as 'uneducated', 'dishonest' and 'criminals' (Bhowmik et al., 2022). Thus, colonialism and contemporary racism and their interaction contributes to the overall racial experiences of minority groups in Hong Kong.

Methodology and methods

This qualitative study sought to understand racial experiences of a group of international students in Hong Kong and how their experiences impacted their academic, social, and mental well-being. Since this study involves actual experiences of participants and interpretations of their perception of different events, a qualitative approach is justified as it enables the researchers to develop a high level of detail from participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009; Gentles et al., 2015). The study employed in-depth interviews with international students in Hong Kong highlighting their different perspectives and interpretation of racial experiences. The in-depth interviews provided a greater breadth to critically understand their perspectives about racism in their institution and how it impacted their international education journey (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Before full scale data collection, a pilot interview was conducted to assess whether the research protocol is realistic and uncover any potential problems (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The interview protocol was adjusted based on the pilot interview.

Participants

The criteria for eligibility to participate in this study were (i) students who are referred to as international students - foreign passport holders with valid Hong Kong study visa (ii) students who are in their 3rd or higher year of study, having spent a considerable time in the university. A total of 10 international students were interviewed for this research upon meeting the criteria. They are from five different countries including three from Bangladesh, three from Kazakhstan, two from Pakistan, one from India, and one from South Korea. Their age range is between 20 to 40, and the majority are Muslims. Table 1 provides their full details including a pseudonym, gender, age, year of study, degree of study, nationality, country of origin, first language, religion. The pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the privacy of the participants. After completing their education in their countries of origin, the participants decided to pursue higher education in Hong Kong. They needed to meet the English language requirement for getting admission into the university which shows their good command over the language. Furthermore, the medium of instruction for their respective degrees is English.

The gender mixture of participants being 70% male and 30% female. Participants' degree of study was an equal mixture of undergraduate and doctoral students specializing in Education, Environment Science, Biomechanics. Undergraduate students were between 20-24 (mean 22.4) and Doctoral students were between 30-39 (mean 34.6). Initially, some participants were identified through personal contacts of the authors and then snowballing technique was applied to identify further participants (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

Table 1

Details of participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year of Study	Study Level	Nationality	Country of Origin	First Language	Religion
Farhana Sultana	F	35	3rd	Doctoral	Bangladeshi	Bangladesh	Bengali	Islam
Yakov Suleimanov	M	23	5th	Bachelor	Kazakh	Kazakhstan	Kazakh	Islam
Iftekhar Hasan	M	30	5th	Doctoral	Pakistani	Pakistan	Urdu	Islam
Imtiaz Ahmad	M	39	3rd	Doctoral	Bangladeshi	Bangladesh	Bengali	Islam
Anara Akhmetov	F	24	3rd	Bachelor	Kazakh	Kazakhstan	Kazakh	Atheist
Park Min-ho	M	23	4th	Bachelor	Korean	South Korea	Korean	Christian, Protestant
Mahira Khan	F	20	3rd	Bachelor	Pakistani	Pakistan	Urdu	Islam
Zahir Ali	M	38	3rd	Doctoral	Indian	India	Hindi	Islam
Erasyl Akhmetov	M	22	3rd	Bachelor	Kazakh	Kazakhstan	Kazakh	Islam
Parvez Rahman	M	31	3rd	Doctoral	Bangladeshi	Bangladesh	Bengali	Islam

Data collection and analysis

The fieldwork for this research began with the approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University. The format of the interviews was semi-structured in nature, the language used was English and all participants chose to be interviewed online via ZOOM. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form. Each participant was interviewed once for approximately one hour, and the interviews were audio-recorded with additional verbal consent. The interview questions were emailed to them some days before the interview to have an initial idea. The interviews were carried out in the second half of 2023. A set pattern was followed while carrying out the interviews. The first set of questions focused on participants' personal background, demographic and educational information. Next set of questions aimed at capturing their racial experience on campus and outside, and how those experiences affected them academically, socially, and mentally. The interview questions are given in the Appendix 1.

We followed several techniques to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the data (Silverman, 2001). Each interview was in-depth and lasted for approximately one hour. Interview data were audio recorded, carefully transcribed, and validated against the record, and presented long excerpts in the findings section. Participants' responses to questions were thoroughly checked to find the consistency in their answers, a way to employ triangulation. Furthermore, data from the pilot study helped to clarify some ideas and focus more on some areas during the subsequent interviews to gather detailed information which ultimately enriched the findings.

Data analysis was done taking into consideration that this is qualitative research and data are descriptive in the form of interview transcripts and therefore, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) approach was used. All the interview data were transcribed verbatim. The analysis steps included identifying units of analysis, coding data, sorting code, checking code, and creating themes (Foss & Waters, 2007). The units of analysis were guided by research questions. The transcripts were read many times thoroughly to understand the depth of racism experienced by the participants, and the similarities and differences in their experiences. The transcripts were then coded. After coding data, they were checked and sorted thoroughly to identify the coding categories or themes. Finally, salient themes were created from the coding categories to answer the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results

We identified three broad themes which elaborate on participants' racial experiences and their effects. These are - racial experiences on campus, racial experiences off campus, and effects of racial experiences on academic, social and mental well-being. Most participants used the term 'discriminatory' or 'racist' during interviews which we used directly in this section.

Racial experiences on campus

The study was conducted at a publicly funded university where majority students are local Chinese and includes a good number of international students. Most of our participants reported that they encountered discriminatory experiences inside campus in subtle forms while the experiences of racism outside campus were explicit. Our analysis suggests that the racial experiences are linked to culture characterized by differences in language, ethnicity, nationality, religious background and cultural practices. The racial experiences inside campus are manifested in exclusion owing to language and communication barriers, and invasive, avoidance and reluctance behaviors by some local Chinese students.

Exclusion owing to language and communication barriers. Chinese-language related barriers have been cited as a major cause of feeling discomfort and discrimination by the international student participants in this study. Even though English is the major selection criteria to get admission and it is used as the primary medium of instruction in all major courses, the local language Cantonese (spoken language of Chinese used by the majority Chinese population in Hong Kong) remains the dominant language of communication. Some professors preferred to give supplementary notes in Chinese, chit chatting with local students in the classroom in Chinese and local students preferred to use Cantonese among themselves. These all added to the frustration of the participants. Lack of proficiency of the local language garnered international students into marginalized positions in the university as a member of the minority group, which they got acquiesced to. For example, Park, a male international student from South Korea studying at Bachelor degree level in his final year of study, shared classroom incidents:

> From time to time in classrooms, professors utilize Cantonese to better explain concepts to the local students. Mostly they try to explain first in English, and they usually use Cantonese as a supplement either to explain in-depth to local students or to converse. So, I think they are treating their local students better. When they start talking in Cantonese, I feel relaxed if I already understood the concept and don't need any further explanation. However, I do get agitated if I don't understand at the first go and would approach the professors to explain more in English.

Park's assertion clearly reflects that because of the language barrier international students did not benefit from some of their professors, the way local Chinese students did. This might result in the exclusion of international students.

Similar experience resonated with Anara, a 24-year-old female student from Kazakhstan studying at Bachelor degree level. She was residing at a university dormitory and due to the language barrier, she faced communication challenges with security staff. She also missed opportunities to participate in voluntary service and internships as all advertisements were in Cantonese. She commented:

In one semester, I was the only non-local student in class, and had a hard time forming a group for a project because people didn't want to let me join their group as they would have to speak in English, which is an additional burden and time consuming for them. Similar incident I faced during online classes - my group would just start discussing everything in Cantonese. I was not really involved in the discussions as they did not involve me and spoke in the local language. All these incidents act as microaggressions creating a snowball effect making me feel uncomfortable and frustrated in total.

Anara referred her experiences to 'microaggressions' due to her inability to communicate in the local language, reflecting her awareness of subtle forms of racism. Being an international student, she was unable to comprehend why the expectation was on her to learn the local language. Furthermore, she expressed there is a deep level of favoritism towards the local students by the university.

Similar feeling was shared by Zahir, a student from India studying at the final year Doctoral degree level. He shared an uncomfortable experience he faced, which was not being able to effectively communicate due to the language barrier. Many people at the university, including local and Mainland Chinese students, preferred not to speak with him in English, even though English knowledge is expected in such an academic setting. He found it frustrating to have to repeat himself multiple times or restructure his sentences to be understood. He expressed: "*I often must repeat myself multiple times before being understood. This difficulty in communication indeed hinders my ability to engage in conversations beyond academic matters, preventing me from further social interaction.*" However, he did not encounter communication issues with other international students from various places including Africa, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. He expressed that these students were receptive, willing to listen, understand, and respond. He did not have local Chinese friends at the university as he tried to form friendships but did not receive a positive response, limiting only to necessary or urgent conversations.

Invasive, avoidance and reluctance behaviors by some local Chinese students. International students experiencing unwanted behaviors by some members of majority groups due to their diverse ethnicity, national identity, religious background and cultural practices, can be related to prejudice and stereotypes against them. Prejudice and stereotypes are the major forms of cultural racism where people are categorized based on their religion, common cultural characteristics, dressing up, type of food consumption, general practices which are believed incompatible with mainstream society (Balibar, 1991). Relating South Asians with criminal activity, radicalization, laziness, and untrustworthiness are the prejudices and stereotypes held by some local Chinese people in Hong Kong (Bhowmik et al., 2022; Bhowmik & Gube, 2022). This is spilled over to international students studying at universities in Hong Kong and hindered their efforts in making friendship with local Chinese students. Mahira, an international student from Pakistan studying at Bachelor degree level shared her experience of invasive behavior from some local Chinese students:

I am a Muslim woman wearing a hijab, because of which I get a lot of stares when I walk on campus hallways. When praying in the library, people were staring and trying to figure out what I was doing. There is also a lot of staring in the dormitory, where people would avoid riding in the elevator with me. On the university shuttle bus, people would choose not to sit next to me and my other international student friends even when there were

> available seats. The most outrageous incident was once when a certain
> group of local students took out their phones to record me and my friends
> while walking past us in the campus central area. They were pretending to
> use their phone but were taking photos. When we walked past them, we
> saw ourselves on their phone. I was too shocked to do anything or report.
> How can anyone ever justify invading someone's privacy like that?

Mahira's above experience is directly linked to cultural racism. Since some local Chinese people have preconceived notions about ethnic minorities who are born and brought up in Hong Kong, they develop similar prejudice and stereotypes about international students. Such behavior stems from a lack of awareness, as some individuals might not have encountered people of different ethnic backgrounds before.

Farhana, an international student from Bangladesh studying at Doctoral degree level, mentioned about avoidance and reluctance behaviors by some local Chinese students despite her attempts to make friendship:

> Within peer groups, there is a tendency of local students not wanting to be
> friends with those from another nationality, especially South Asians. I was
> ignored when I asked for some local students' names or contact information
> like phone numbers. There seems to be some sort of trust issue and
> common mindset regarding South Asians. Even though these experiences
> are not major problems but kind of leave a negative impression about the
> country and local people questioning my judgment whether it was the
> correct decision to come here for my higher education.

Imtiaz, a 30-year-old international student from Bangladesh studying at Doctoral degree level shared the similar experience of avoidance and reluctance behaviors by some local Chinese students. He commented:

> First, regarding my peers, Chinese lab mates or colleagues are unwilling to
> share information about their experiments, which I find selfish. They have
> this stereotypical idea that I won't work hard and cannot be trusted, which
> I believe is due to my national identity. This to me is an extreme form of
> racism and discriminatory behavior towards South Asians. I have faced
> difficulty making friends with local students, finding them unfriendly and
> uninterested in initiating conversations unless necessary. Due to this
> challenge, I have made my own comfort zone with students who are from
> similar backgrounds as me.

As we observed among participants, exclusion due to language and communication barriers, and invasive, avoidance and reluctance behaviors by some local Chinese students limited international students' interaction with their local Chinese peers. This contributed international students to perceive that they were not welcomed. Furthermore, their perceptions grew stronger over time as they also faced racial experiences outside campus.

Racial experiences off campus

Alienation inside campus shocked most of the international student participants in this study. In addition, there were instances of some blatant and direct racist behavior some participants encountered from some local Chinese people outside the campus. Iftekhar, an international student from Pakistan studying at Doctoral degree level mentioned how on a regular basis he encountered

racism and uncomfortable experiences, particularly while traveling on public transportation like the MTR and buses. He expressed:

> In public transport, local people, for no reason, displayed dislike towards international students or individuals like us. For example, they would avoid sitting beside me or would vacate their seats and walk away immediately if I approached sitting beside them. I find these situations embarrassing and get a sense that locals do not favor international people.

Kazakh student Anara reflected how her appearance, which does not fit into the typical South Asian or East Asian stereotype, a man mistook her for a Filipino domestic helper. In another example, Erasyl, an international student from Kazakhstan studying at Bachelor degree level, discussed his internship experience at a local company where most employees were Chinese. Being a non- Chinese person, he felt that his cultural differences were often highlighted, particularly when it came to food preferences or choices of activities. Everyone would look at him with surprise when he expressed his preferences. Farhana had difficulty renting an apartment outside campus as landlords did not trust her due to her South Asian origin and spoke about it blatantly. Being told by a landlord that they did not trust her and only trusted her university affiliation, which had a particularly strong negative impact on her mental well-being.

Effects of racial experiences on academic, social and mental well-being

Some international student participants suffered from identity conflict due to the feeling of not fitting into the new culture and negative perception about their country of origin. They found a mismatch between their desired identities and negative identities imposed by locals, which made them pessimistic about the new country. This conflict coupled with unfavorable behaviors from some local Chinese students created various effects. In literature, racism in Hong Kong is dismissed by some Chinese people on the grounds of being non-violent and is explained as ignorance or lack of awareness (Bhowmik et al., 2022). Such an action tends to normalize racism and dilute its negative effects. As a result, some Chinese people never warmly embrace international students, rather engage in subtle racism. Most international students in this research expressed their desire to go back to their country after completion of degree due to the feeling of not being welcomed both inside and outside campus which have repercussions on their academic, social, and mental well-being.

The language and communication barriers, stereotypes and prejudice against international students and some local Chinese students' reluctance of mixing with international students create a strong wall for international students to break through. Subsequently this does contribute to extra mental pressure for international students who live far away from their home, family, relatives and friends. Like other students, Parvez, a student from Bangladesh studying at Doctoral degree level, also failed to make meaningful interaction with local Chinese students due to their reluctance, which he perceived stemming from prejudice and stereotypes against South Asian international students. Parvez shared how such racial experiences on campus affected his mental well-being:

> I have been engulfed in sadness and loneliness since I do not have any family members or relatives in Hong Kong. Sometimes I felt helpless, due to these instances of discrimination resulting in a strong negative impact on my mental well-being. I became socially recluse and was losing interest in my academic studies. Even started to question my decision to come to Hong Kong. To cope with these situations, I reached out and communicated with my family members online more often. By engaging in these

conversations and seeking support from loved ones, I found motivation and
was able to move forward despite the challenges.

Almost all Muslim participants mentioned the lack of halal food options and prayer rooms on campus made them uncomfortable and unhappy. With a growing number of Muslim students, the absence of halal food on campus became a significant issue, requiring students to seek food options outside the campus. Kazakh student Erasyl expressed a grievance shared by many other Muslim students to explain how students' daily lives were affected:

> Food is an integral part of anyone's daily life. Having issues with this
> necessity causes huge mental trauma. We have reached out so many times
> to the authorities but still nothing has been done. This makes me question
> whether this is some sort of racist behavior to Muslim students?

Erasyl also felt he was singled out in the class. Especially when some local Chinese students faced difficulty with his name pronunciation; it created a sense of tension and made him feel like an outsider or foreigner in the class. He felt uncomfortable and isolated, as if there was a division between "us" and "not us" that he/other international students were placed in "not us". To cope with these situations, he developed a coping mechanism of laughing it off and making jokes to ease the tension. By employing humor and acknowledging his status as a foreigner, he attempted to diffuse the situation and moved on.

Yakov, a final year student from Kazakhstan studying at Bachelor degree level shared how he was affected by the lack of prayer facility:

> Throughout my education journey in Hong Kong, I had to struggle with
> having to make daily decisions about where to pray, such as using disabled
> toilets, the library, or another room. Not having a designated prayer space
> affected my enthusiasm and faith, and I believe also have negatively
> impacted other Muslim students. This has made me frustrated,
> disappointed even initially losing focus on my studies. However, I found a
> sense of peace by being involved in various initiatives, including in a
> Muslim association and by individually gathering with other international
> students.

Discriminatory experiences both inside and outside campus propelled most of the international student participants to perceive that the racial climate of Hong Kong is unwelcoming to say the least. Initially all received a bit of a shock and became frustrated with the behaviors of some Chinese students; however, they eventually learnt to cope and deal with the situation mainly by mixing with students from similar background/culture/nationality.

Discussion and implications

This study found evidence of international students being ostracized by some local Chinese students on campus making them feel lonely, helpless, and stressed out, which propelled them to adapt some coping mechanisms to survive the remaining study years and return to their homeland. This is consistent with a considerable amount of research from various contexts indicating that international students encounter racial experiences (Halpern et al., 2024; Koo et al., 2023; Lee & Rice, 2007; Sung, 2022; Yao et al., 2019, 2021; Yao, 2018). Our participants shared detailed experiences of neoracism due to their diverse language, ethnicity, culture, national origin, and religious affiliation, which is unique, and previous studies have rarely captured such an in-depth account in Chinese context.

Participants in this study reported that they experienced discrimination based on language and communication barriers, and invasive, avoidance and reluctance behaviors by some local Chinese students. The participants revealed the difficulties they faced while living and studying as international students in Hong Kong. The behavior of some local Chinese students and people outside campus yielded international student participants' perception of not being welcomed, which contrasted their earlier imagination when they decided with strong motivation to pursue their higher education in Hong Kong. This unwelcoming feeling sometimes led to an identity crisis where international students felt that they were being grouped as 'others' based on local Chinese students' preconceived notion about ethnic minorities and cultural differences. Similar findings were reported in the previous research (Sung, 2022).

We also observed that international students experienced discrimination and racism more due to the assumed link created by some local Chinese students about Hong Kong born and/or educated ethnic minority students from similar ethnic backgrounds. This observation is consistent with a study conducted on international students living in the US (Koo et al., 2023). While our international student participants from Central Asia and East Asia experienced discrimination mainly based on language barriers and cultural differences, our South Asian international students' racial experiences were based on their diverse race, ethnicity, religion and culture. International student participants felt that they were not welcomed, and some local Chinese students did not want to mingle with them. This was a huge blockage to their educational and living experiences in Hong Kong which negatively impacted their educational, social and mental well-being.

An interesting finding of this study is the relationship some local Chinese students tried to develop with an international student participant. The international student participant who looked like them and they presumed that the student was from a similar cultural background; their attitude was significantly different compared with their behavior with other international students from different cultural backgrounds. That participant didn't have any discriminatory experience in Hong Kong other than the language barrier. Some local Chinese students refrained from mixing with international student participants who were extroverted and spoke their mind as they found such attributes are different from their own. This is another interesting finding which shows that local Chinese students tried to find similarity with international students in terms of culture or way of life; and whenever they found divergences they tended to avoid. Almost all International students of South Asian origins reported discrimination and somewhat racist behavior from some local Chinese students. To cope with those experiences and resulting impact on their well-being, international students developed their own coping mechanisms, for instance, trying to create awareness through knowledge building about their national origin or mixing with students from similar cultural backgrounds.

Based on our findings, we suggest several strategies for creating a better racial climate for international students. First, student service offices in universities dealing with international students should attend to their needs and provide services which cater to those specific needs (Koo, Nyunt, et al., 2021; Koo, Baker, et al., 2021; and Yao et al., 2021). Counseling services should be provided to international students on a priority basis, especially to those whose mental wellbeing are being compromised and suffering from loneliness. According to participants, there were not many support services available for international students targeting their needs. Universities in Hong Kong need to step up and provide a safe zone for international students to report any discrimination or racism they experience both inside and outside campus. Educators, leaders and support staff should openly publicize about such offices and personals where international students can freely speak.

Second, educators, support staff, leaders, and policy makers can arrange forums, workshops, activities, and sharing sessions where international students can come together in groups and share their stories. International students will know there are many people like them who are going through the same crisis; through sharing sessions they will also get ideas how to overcome and be motivated. Through these sharing sessions leaders, policy makers and other organizations will get to know international students' narratives on discrimination which may have previously been overlooked and need advocating. These sharing sessions may be organized outside university campus so that the international students feel at ease and give them an opportunity to break free from the mental trauma that they are going through.

Third, special support needs to be provided to South Asian international students. As per the findings of this study, South Asian international students experience higher discrimination compared to other national origins. Student service offices must investigate this issue deeply. Arranging cultural events and workshops combining both local and international students can foster a positive climate on campus. As suggested by Bhowmik et al. (2022) knowledge about multiculturalism can harness strong bonds and respect between local and international students. Buddy programs and language exchange programs may be implemented to improve racial and ethnic sensitivity and create an inclusive climate on campus (Koo et al., 2023).

Although our study is based on Hong Kong data, it has international implications. Our study reports how international students encountered racism at an Asian university located in Hong Kong, a Chinese context. The findings highlight the temporal and spatial characters of racism in Hong Kong shaped by its distinctive social, cultural and political contexts (Bhowmik et al., 2022). It is important to document the manifestation of racism and its effects in various contexts in order for developing a comprehensive knowledgebase about racism globally and theorising it.

Conclusion

Our study is limited to only participants from one university in Hong Kong. Focusing on more universities will give more breadth of data. However, it is quite alarming to reveal that in this era of diversity and inclusion and Hong Kong being Asia's world city, international students coming in for higher education are being racialized. The findings of this research can be an eye opener for policy makers and educators to advocate this issue as Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China, moves forward for further internationalizing its higher education. Local Chinese students sometimes may not understand the consequences of their actions. Therefore, awareness needs to be raised among local Chinese students for a better inclusive climate around campus. Ultimately, success of internationalization of higher education in Hong Kong will not only depend on the headcounts of international students, but also on their lived experiences, which they will share with prospective students from their homeland and the rest of the world. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to pay attention to the needs of already enrolled international students by promoting positive interaction with local Chinese students to foster an inclusive climate.

Acknowledgement

to the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback and to the *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* for their editorial support.

References

Balibar, E. (1991). Is there a 'neo-racism. In E. Balibar & I. M. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities,* (pp. 17–28). Verso.

Bardhan, N., & Zhang, B. (2017). A post/decolonial view of race and identity through the narratives of US international students from the Global South. *Communication Quarterly*, *65*(3), 285–306. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2016.1237981

Bhowmik, M. K., Cheung, R. Y., & Hue, M. T. (2018). Acculturative stress and coping strategies among Mainland Chinese university students in Hong Kong: A qualitative inquiry. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *88*(5), 550-562. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000338

Bhowmik, M. K. (2021). A qualitative inquiry of acculturation experiences of minoritised youth in Hong Kong. *Curriculum Perspectives*, *41*(2), 131-141.https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-021-00141-9

Bhowmik, M., & Gube, J. (2022). Anti-racist values and intercultural skills. In K. J. Kennedy, M. Pavlova, & J. C.-K. Lee (Eds.). *Soft skills and hard values: Meeting education's 21st century challenges,* (pp. 133-148). Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Bhowmik, M. K., Chan, A. H., & Halse, C. M. (2022). Multiculturalism and the cultural politics of racism in Hong Kong. *Multicultural Education Review*, *14*(1), 13-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2022.2040142

Boafo-Arthur, S. (2014). Acculturative experiences of Black-African international students. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, *36*(2), 115–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-013-9194-8

Bordoloi, S. D. (2014). On Being Brown and Foreign: The Racialization of an International Student within Academia. *Sociological Imagination*, *50*(3).

Brown, J., and Brown, L. (2013). The International Student Sojourn Identity Conflict and Threats to Well-Being. British. *Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *41*(4), 395–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.729026

Brown, L., & Jones, I. (2013). Encounters with racism and the international student experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(7), 1004–1019. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.614940

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Byrd, D. & McKinney, K. J. (2012). Individual, Interpersonal, and Institutional Level Factors Associated with the Mental Health of College Students. *Journal of American College Health*, 60, 185–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2011.584334

Cantwell, B., & Lee, J. (2010). Unseen workers in the academic factory: Perceptions of neoracism among international postdocs in the United States and the United Kingdom. *Harvard Educational Review*, *80*(4), 490–517. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.80.4.w54750105q78p451

Census and Statistics Department. (2022). *2021 Population Census, Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Retrieved from* https://www.census2021.gov.hk/doc/pub/21c-ethnic-minorities.pdf

Census and Statistics Department. (2023). *Statistics on Students of University Grants Committee*

Funded Programmes. Retrieved from https://data.gov.hk/en-data/dataset/hk-censtatd-tablechart-fa100238

Cheung, A. C. K. (2013). Language, academic, socio-cultural and financial adjustments of mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *27*(3), 221-241. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541311306459

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches (3rd Ed.)*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Dengg, M. A. (2022). (Neo)-Racism among International Students. *International Research and Review*, *12*(1), 52-64.

Faugier, J., & Sargeant, M. (1997). Sampling hard to reach populations. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *26*, 790-797. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.00371

Gao, F. (2024). Understanding campus-based intercultural social capital for minority university students in Hong Kong. *Comparative Education*, *60*(2), 334–350. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2024.2317070

Gao, X., & Hua, Z. (2021). Experiencing Chinese Education: Learning of Language and Culture by International Students in Chinese Universities. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *34*(4), 353–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1871002

Gao, F., & Liu, H. C. Y. (2021). Guests in someone else's house? Sense of belonging among ethnic minority students in a Hong Kong university. *British Educational Research Journal*, *47*(4), 1004–1020. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3704

Gentles, S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbon, K. (2015). Sampling in Qualitative Research: Insights from an Overview of the Methods Literature. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(11), 1772–1789.

Gong, Y., Gao, X., Li, M., & Lai, C. (2021). Cultural adaptation challenges and strategies during study abroad: New Zealand students in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *34*(4), 417-437. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1856129

Halpern, C. & Aydin, H.. (2021). International students' lived experiences in a predominantly White institution in Southwest Florida. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, *16*(2), 145-164. https://doi.org/10.1515/mlt-2020-0005

Halpern, B., Halpern, C., & Aydin, H. (2024). "We're Building Our Little International Community": A University-Sponsored Program for International Students. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change, 9*(1), 04. https://doi.org/10.20897/jcasc/14930

Hoang, A. P., & Jordan, L. P. (2019). Internationalisation and intersectionality in Hong Kong university student life: an exploratory study of social exclusion. *Multicultural Education Review*, *11*(2), 114–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2019.1615247

Hong Kong Education Bureau. (2017a). *The policy of Developing Hong Kong's status as a regional education hub. Study in HK. Retrieved from*: http://www.studyinhongkong.edu.hk/en/hong-kong-education/the-policy-of-developing-hk-s-status-as-a-regional-education-hub.php

Hong Kong Education Bureau. (2017b). *Employment: Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG). Study in HK. Retrieved from:* http://www.studyinhongkong.edu.hk/en/employment.php

Hong Kong Education Bureau. (2017c). *Scholarships. Study in HK. Retrieved from* http://www.studyinhongkong.edu.hk/en/hong-kong-education/scholarships.php

Hurtado, S., Milem, J.F., Clayton-Pedersen, A.R., & Allen, W.R. (1998). Enhancing Campus Climates for Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Educational Policy and Practice. *The Review of Higher Education, 21*(3), 279-302. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1998.0003

James, G. (2018). A narrative inquiry perspective into coping mechanisms of international postgraduate students' transition experiences. *American Journal of Qualitative Research, 2*(1), 41-56. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/5793

Koo, K. K., Yao, C. W., & Gong, H. J. (2023). "It is not my fault": Exploring experiences and perceptions of racism among international students of color during COVID-19. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *16*(3), 284–296. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000343

Koo, K., Baker, I., & Yoon, J. (2021). The first year acculturation: A longitudinal study on acculturative stress and adjustment among the first year international college students. *Journal of International Students*, *11*(2), 278–298. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i2.1726

Koo, K., Kim, Y. W., Lee, J., & Nyunt, G. (2021). "It's My Fault": Exploring Experiences and Mental Wellness Among Korean International Graduate Students. *Journal of International Students*, *11*(4), 790–811. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i4.2801

Koo, K., Nyunt, G., & Wang, B. (2021). Who spends too much time online?: Associated factors of Internet addiction among international college students in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, *11*(1), 122-143.

Ladegaard, H. J., & Cheng, H. F. (2014). Constructing the cultural 'other': prejudice and intergroup conflict in university students' discourses about 'the other.' Language and *Intercultural Communication, 14*(2), 156–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2013.849718

Lee, Cheng-Fei. (2017). Exploring motivations for studying abroad: A case study of Taiwan. *Tourism Analysis, 22*(4), 523–536. https://doi.org/10.3727/108354217X15023805452077

Lee, J. (2006). International Student Experiences: Neo-Racism and Discrimination. *International Higher Education*, *44*.

Lee, J. S. (2017). Challenges of International Students in a Japanese University: Ethnographic Perspectives. *Journal of International Students*, *7*(1), 73-93.

Lee, J., & Opio, T. (2011). Coming to America: challenges and difficulties faced by African student athletes. *Sport, Education and Society*, *16*(5), 629–644. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.601144

Lee, J. J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, *53*(3), 381–409. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3

Lee, J., Jon, J.-E., & Byun, K. (2017). Neo-Racism and Neo-Nationalism Within East Asia: The Experiences of International Students in South Korea. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *21*(2), 136-155. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315316669903

Lobnibe, J. F. Y. (2013). Different worlds, mutual expectations: African graduate student mothers and the burden of US higher education. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *2*(2), 201–209. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v2n2p201

Marginson, S., C. Nyland, E. Sawir, and H. Forbes-Mewett. (2010). *International student security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, D., & Maloff, A. (2016). Racial positionalities, professional development, and a \master's study abroad experience in Jamaica for future student affairs professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *34*(2), 3–15. doi: 10.1353/csj.2016.0010

Mitchell, D., Steele, T., Marie, J., & Timm, K. (2017). Learning Race and Racism While Learning: Experiences of International Students Pursuing Higher Education in the Midwestern United States. *AERA Open*, *3*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417720402

Mok. K. H., Xiong, W., Ke. G., & Cheung, J. O. W. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education and student mobility: Student perspectives from mainland

China and Hong Kong. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *105*, 101718. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101718

Schumaker, E. (2020, September 22). Timeline: How coronavirus got started: The outbreak spanning the globe began in December, in Wuhan, China. *ABC News*. Retrieved from https://abcnews.go.com/Health/timeline-coronavirus-started/story?id=69435165

Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Spears, A. (1999). Race and ideology: An introduction*, In *Spears, A. (Ed.), Race and Ideology: Language, Symbolism, and Popular Culture*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State Press.

Sung, C. (2017). Understanding classroom participation and identity negotiation: An undergraduate student's L2 learning experiences in an English-medium university in Hong Kong. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *8*(4), 375-399. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2016-1026

Sung, C. C. M. (2021). International students' negotiation of identities during transnational studies in Hong Kong: the role of language. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *51*(5), 764–781. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2019.1674635

Sung, C. C. M. (2022). Identity Conflicts and Negotiations: Narratives of Asian International Students' Experiences in Hong Kong. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 43*(5), 639–656. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2022.2063818

Talley-Matthews, S., Wiggan, G., & Watson-Vandiver, M. J. (2022). Outsider in the academy: experiences and perspectives of Caribbean women attending predominantly White institutions in the southeastern region of the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *25*(6), 795–814. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1718077

Tausen, B.M., Jin, J., Kim, P.Y., Law, K., & Kendall, D. (2020). Academic Community Support, Campus Racial Climate, and Subjective Well-Being during the Coronavirus Outbreak among Asian American College Students. *Journal of Asian American Studies, 23*(3), 367-385. https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2020.0030.

University Grants Committee [UGC]. (1996). *Higher education in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

University Grants Committee [UGC]. (2004). *Hong Kong higher education: To make a difference, to move with the times*. Hong Kong: University Grants Committee.

Vyas, A. (2018). A policy review of internationalization of higher education in Hong Kong: motivation, advancement and development. Journal of Asian Public Policy, *11*(1), 46–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2017.1390033

Wu, H.P., Garza, E., and Guzman, N. (2015). International Student's Challenge and Adjustment to College. *Education Research International, 2015*. https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/202753

Yao, C. W. (2018). "They don't care about you": Chinese international students' experiences with neo-racism and othering on a U.S. campus. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *30* (1), 87–101. Retrieved From https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1090&context=cehsedadfacpub

Yao, C. W., George Mwangi, C. A., & Malaney Brown, V. K. (2019). Exploring the intersection of transnationalism and critical race theory: a critical race analysis of international student experiences in the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *22*(1), 38–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497968

Yao, C. W., Briscoe, K. L., & Rutt, J. N. (2021). In the aftermath of a racialized incident: Exploring international students of color's perceptions of campus racial climate. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *14*(3), 386–397. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000179

Yiu, W. (2023, July 5). Hong Kong universities can 'double intake of non-local students' under proposal to attract more talent to city. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved From https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3226569/hong-kong-universities-can-double-intake-non-local-students-under-proposal-attract-more-talent-city

Yu, B., & Wright, E. (2017). Academic adaptation amid internationalisation: The challenges for local, mainland Chinese, and international students at Hong Kong's universities. *Tertiary Education and Management*, *23*(4), 347-360. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2017.1356365

Notes on contributors

Dr Miron Bhowmik is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Education Policy and Leadership (EPL), The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK). He also serves as the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Specialist in the Faculty of Education and Human Development. His research interest includes education and well-being of minoritised groups, as well as related policies and leadership practices. His work has appeared in, among others, *Race Ethnicity and Education, Cambridge Journal of Education, Asian Ethnicity, Multicultural Education Review, Journal of Counseling Psychology, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Curriculum Perspectives, and Asia Pacific Journal of Education.*

Dr Sohana Wadud Ahmad is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the Education University of Hong Kong. She completed her doctoral degree from the School of Management, Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand. She was a Lecturer at BRAC University, Bangladesh, before she pursued her doctoral degree, which was based on financial innovation and economic inclusion. She previously worked as a Research Assistant at the Education University of Hong Kong. Her previous research focused on DEI and ethnic minority education, adapting qualitative approaches. Her recent project involves school leadership and inclusion.

ORCID

Miron Bhowmik, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4585-781X
Sohana Wadud Ahmad, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1121-6141

Appendix 1: Interview questions

1. Background, demographic and educational information.
2. Have you encountered any racism or discrimination or any other indecent/uncomfortable experiences at your university? If yes, what are those? Please explain.
3. How have these experiences of racism or discrimination or others affected you in various ways (academic, mentally, socially)? How did you deal with them? Please explain.
4. Have you encountered any racism or discrimination or any other indecent/uncomfortable experiences outside your university? If yes, what are those? Please explain.
5. How have these experiences of racism or discrimination or others affected you in various ways (academic, mentally, socially)? How did you deal with them? Please explain.
6. How do you find the curriculum and mode of teaching preferable for international students? Please explain.
7. How do you find the Professors and Support Staff at your institution are compassionate and willing to listen to the hardship encountered by international students? Please explain.
8. What is your view about the relationship between the local students and international students in your institution? Do you find them friendly, warm and inclusive? Please explain.