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“Why Are We Being Labelled?”

By: King-mong Chan

On June 27th, a group of almost 40 Chinese community members gathered at the Oppenheimer Park House for our monthly community meeting in Cantonese. We began our meeting by saying one thing that would improve our lives or one good thing in our lives that we hope we will continue to have. The responses ranged from being thankful that we have housing and grateful that people hand out water and gifts at the Park to hoping that there would be less homelessness and that income levels would reflect rent increases and the cost of medications. Other people spoke about how great it was to have social activities, how they wish there would be less garbage in the streets and at the Park, and how they would like there to be a canopy at Oppenheimer Park as a shelter from the rain.

At our meeting, we continued discussing the issue of discrimination in our neighbourhood and I read out the two responses to the May 15th CCAP article titled, “Discrimination Against Chinese People” – one response was from a group of Dugout volunteers, titled, “Editor,” which was published in the June 1st issue of the Carnegie Newsletter and another titled “I would like this [letter] passed...”, which was published in the June 15th issue of the Carnegie Newsletter.

The responses may be surprising to some because the participants actually agreed to some of the points raised in the articles: “I don’t know why some seniors take so much” and “I think taking a cart is unacceptable.” But they also talked about why they were being labelled as if taking more than “allowed” is only a “Chinese-thing” and that all Chinese people have this same behaviour. This labelling results in the comment that I far too often hear – that we, the Chinese, receive less than the non-Chinese whether it be food, clothing, or other hand-outs etc. Then we also have the racist attitudes against the Chinese community as a whole, such as those revealed in the letter written by the group of Dugout volunteers as well as people swearing at Chinese people on the streets. With the aim of stopping the discrimination at service agencies, a group of us also met with MLA Jenny Kwan on June 28th to tell her our experiences of discrimination and to continue working together toward a solution.

Over the past months of talking with Chinese-speaking individuals, I’m often reminded that although each community share a lot of similarities, there are also a lot of differences - everyone in the Chinese community has their own stories and experiences and each face challenges of their own. When a Chinese person takes more than is allowed, people often generalize and say “the Chinese” instead of “this person” - this is racism and it has to stop.

But what of these Chinese individuals who are often said and seen to take a lot of food and don't line-up properly? I'm sure their experiences are diverse as well and I'm still trying to understand more of them. From what I've heard so far though, it is essential to remember what their lives back in China were like. This includes women being treated as "objects" and "furniture," as Deanna Wong describes (see the article written in *The Tyee* by Jackie Wong, titled "Old, Alone and Victims of Racism in Downtown Eastside"). There was also the period of tremendous starvation in the mid-20th century, with the 30 million deaths alone in a 3-year period (1960-1962) known as the Great Famine (see the article published in *The Atlantic*, titled "After 50 Years of Silence, China Slowly Confronts the 'Great Leap Forward'"). Those who survived those days of starvation are among those in the food lines. It's no wonder they would try to take a lot of food even if it isn't high quality food. It can be linked to the trauma caused by the period of intense starvation that their families and communities suffered and now this trauma is seen through something like food hoarding. However, this definitely does not mean there aren't any low-income Chinese people in our community that need food or who may be taking more to give to their friends who are not as physically able as they are to stand and line-up for food.

I hope this knowledge will help us understand members of the Chinese community more. I admit that language is a barrier but it isn't a reason to become racist and to be judgmental; instead we need to be compassionate to other members of the low-income community, as we seek to understand others better. As I keep saying, the fight is not against others who are in the boat with us and are also being oppressed; our fight is against the forces that are oppressing us and trying to make the boat we're in sink.

為何我們被標籤？

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接近 40 位華人在 6 月 27 日出席在日本花園每月的粵語社區研討會。開始時，大家說出任何一件會令我們生活得更好或一件好的事情我們想繼續保持的。回應範圍從：『感謝有屋住』、『感激別人到花園派水和禮物』、繼而『期望減少無家可歸者』及『希望收入同租金及藥物價格成正比例』。亦有人表示有這個社區活動很好，期望減少垃圾在街上和花園，也希望花園有個帳篷屋作為避雨用。

在研討會裏，我們繼續討論在這社區內被歧視的問題。我讀出兩篇回應加麗基社區行動計劃 5 月 15 日題目名為『被歧視的華人』的文章。一篇是由 Dugout 服務機構的義工寫的，題目是『編輯』刊登於 6 月 1 日加麗基通訊，而另一篇名為『這封信給...』亦是刊登於 6 月 15 日加麗基通訊。

回應的內容可能令有些人驚訝，然而參與者實際上都認同文章內容所提出其中的幾點，例如：『不明白為甚麼有些長者拿取這麼多』和『用購物車去拿取很多食物是不可以接受的』。但他們都談及〔為何只是華人〕被標籤拿取『過多』及『所有華人都是有這個相同的行為』。因被標籤的後果而令我常常聽到...《我們華人所領取到無論是食物，衣物或派發物品等都是比非華人少》。還有，我們還遇到種族主義對抗華人社區，正如的 Dugout 服務機構義工所寫的信中所提及在街上遇到別人對他們說粗語穢語。為達到在服務機構停止被歧視情，我們在 6 月 28 日與關慧貞省議員見面，向她反映華人被歧視及共同尋求解決方案。

在過去的數月與華人接觸，我經常被提醒：『雖然每個社區都共享好多相同，但也同樣有好多差異』。每個人在華人社區內都有他們各自的故事及經歷，與及每個人各自面對自己的困難。當有一個華人拿取超過所允許時便被人概括說成『中國人』，而不只是說『有一個人』，這就是種族主義！這是要停止及制止的！

為甚麼這些被人議論及看到的華人會拿取很多的食物和不守秩序？我確信他們有各種的經歷因而我努力去明白及更多了解。以我所聽聞得來，明白他們從前在中國過的生活是怎麼樣是極之重要的！正如 Deanna Wong 所描寫一婦女被視為一件『物品』，或『傢俬』，參閱刊登於 The Tyee 內由 Jackie Wong 所寫的文章—標題是：『老、孤獨、和在市中心東端的種族主義受害者』。在 20 世紀中期的嚴重大饑荒裏，只在 1960-1962 這 3 年內（稱為大饑荒）已經有 30 百萬人在裏死去（見發表於大西洋的文章，標題為（沉寂 50 年後，中國慢慢地面對巨大的飛躍）。在排隊輪候領取食物的人群中，有些倖存者也在其中，難怪他們會拿取去比較多的食物，甚致一些已經不新鮮的食物也是一樣。因嚴重饑荒時期所引起的創傷而連接到他們的家庭和社區也受苦，甚致在目前可以透過他們囤積食物也看到這些創傷。但是，這絕對不是指在華人社區內是沒有低收入人任，他們是不需要食物。有些人拿取多些是去分給朋友因他們體能的問題而不能夠親自去排隊領取。

我希望這一點資料會幫助我們更深入了解這社區的華人。我承認語言是一個障礙但不是一個原因去歧視同論斷華人，反而在這低收入的社區內我們需要對別人有一棵同情心。正如我經常說：『我們的鬥爭不是與我們同坐一艘船內受欺壓的人，乃是與那欺壓和想打沉我們的船的勢力。』