

## MASTER'S THESIS

### Language maintenance or language shift?: a study of South Asian ethnic minorities' Chinese language learning in Hong Kong

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**Language Maintenance or Language Shift? A Study of South Asian  
Ethnic Minorities' Chinese Language Learning in Hong Kong**

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## **Abstract**

South Asian immigrants of Hong Kong and their descendants commonly find it difficult to retain their native languages in a new speech community. Besides, they need the knowledge of Chinese to survive and integrate into the mainstream society. However, their below-average Chinese abilities cause them to suffer from unequal power relations and various types of discrimination. Hence, the South Asian ethnic minorities' difficulties and problems of acquiring Chinese are increasingly a matter of concern. The present study investigated whether language maintenance or shift occurs among the South Asian ethnic minorities. An attempt was made to discover the South Asians' language choice, attitude, the influence of various sociolinguistic factors and the situation of their Chinese acquisition. The data was collected from a survey of forty-six South Asians from eleven to seventy years old and from the follow-up interviews with six chosen respondents. The data was then statistically analyzed according to the needs to answer the research questions. The findings indicate that the subjects' language choice, attitudes and the situation of their learning of Chinese are all associated with some sociolinguistic factors. Language shift possibly takes place among them, though language maintenance exists. It also discusses the difficult environment for South Asians to learn Chinese. Surprisingly, many of the South Asians would like to learn Putonghua. The results suggest that it is urgent for educators, the government and researchers to work out some solutions to help them get rid of the unfavorable social factors that adversely affect their desire for acquiring the literacy of Chinese and set up an appropriate teaching pedagogy to help them acquire Chinese effectively.

## 摘要

在香港，南亞裔移民和他們的後代很難在一個新的語言社區維持他們的母語。他們需要中文來生存和融入主流社會。然而，他們的中文能力低於平均水平，這導致他們遭受不平等的權力關係和不同類型的歧視。因此，南亞裔人士學習中文的困難和問題日漸受到關注。本論文探討在南亞少數族裔中是否有語言保存或語言遷移的問題。具體而言，本文試圖查明南亞裔人士的語言選擇、語言態度、各種社會語言學因素的影響和他們學習中文的情況。本研究以四十六名十一到七十歲的南亞裔人士為研究對象，讓他們接受問卷調查。此外，其中六名人士隨後還接受後續訪問。研究結果發現，語言選擇、語言態度以及南亞裔人士學習中文的情況都受到社會語言學因素的影響。雖然他們的語言現在得到保存，但同時也出現了語言遷移的情況。此外，本文還討論了南亞裔人士學習中文的困難環境。意想不到的是許多南亞裔人士想學習的普通話。結果表明，教育工作者、政府和研究人員應盡快設法幫助南亞裔人士克服消極對待學習中文讀寫的社會因素，應找出適當的教學法來幫助他們有效率地學習中文。

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