

## **NWSSDTP CASE Studentship**

### **Young Hong Kongers in Britain: coming of age, youth-led migrant rights and acts of citizenship**

#### **Full project description**

This CASE studentship centres on the experiences of young Hong Kongers newly arriving in the UK. Through a focus on acts of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008), it examines how they claim the right to claim rights denied to them in Hong Kong SAR (HKSAR) by advocating for political and migrant rights in the UK. This will build on existing research on migrants' rights activism in other contexts which has shown how migrants have claimed rights under surprising conditions and in doing so have questioned and disrupting existing scripts of citizenship (McNevin, 2011; Sirriyeh, 2019). The project has been co-designed by **Professor Michaela Benson**, **Dr Ala Sirriyeh** and **Dr Eva Li** (Department of Sociology, Lancaster) and **Simon Cheng** of **Hongkongers in Britain**, the leading Hong Kong expatriate association in the UK.

#### **Background**

From the start of 2021, there has been a significant increase in the number of Hong Kongers migrating to the UK. In the wake of rising political tensions and conflict in HKSAR, the UK Government opened up a bespoke visa route—the Hong Kong BN(O) visa (HKBN(O) visa)—to facilitate the migration and settlement in the UK of those seeking to leave the region. Between January 2021 and June 2022 (when the UK's latest immigration statistics were released) there have been 133,124 visas granted through the scheme.

The original eligibility criteria for the visa scheme restricted these to those born before 1997—when sovereignty of HK was transferred from Britain to China—and their dependents. This meant that the route was out of reach to many of the young Hong Kongers (18-24 years old) who had come of age in the context of pro-democracy movements against the HK Government. In consequence, entry of young Hong Kongers to the UK not eligible for the HK BN(O) visa was initially via student and work visas, or with the intention of claiming asylum in the UK. Forthcoming changes to the eligibility for the visa will mean that those with one BN(O) parent can apply independently to the scheme. Many young Hong Kongers will be able to switch status when this is enacted.

While there has been research into the experiences of young Hong Kongers within social movements in Hong Kong (see for example Ho and Wan 2021; Ku 2020; Lee and Sing 2019) and the Hong Kong BN(O) visa (Benson 2021), empirical research with Hong Kongers newly arriving in the UK is necessarily at an incipient stage and has yet to focus exclusively on young Hong Kongers, for whom routes to migration and settlement are, because of their age, inherently more complicated and in consequence of their involvement in pro-democracy movement, more politically charged.

This project addresses this lacuna through the following research questions:

1. In the context of migration flows from Hong Kong to the UK and their governance through both the Hong Kong BN(O) visa route and standard immigration controls, what routes are young Hong Kongers—18-24 years old—using to migrate to and settle in the UK?
2. How are their experiences of migration and settlement in the UK shaped by coming of age in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) against the backdrop of pro-democracy uprisings? How do these shape the ways in which they advocate for political and migrant rights?
3. In what ways are their political actions shaped by the longstanding relationship between the British Government and the people of Hong Kong?

#### **Methodology**

Through a mixed methods approach, this project aims to:

**Map how young Hong Kongers are arriving and settling in the UK through statistical analysis and new survey data**  
It meets this aim through conducting basic statistical analysis of publicly available statistics produced by the Office for

National Statistics, identifying trends in arrivals of Hong Kongers in the UK from 2019—when the HK Government first introduced plans to change legislation to permit extradition from Hong Kong to China—until 2026 (when the thesis will be submitted). Given the context where it is likely that many of those arriving have subsequently changed their legal status—as new routes open up, as other statuses are shut down—in this way navigating the UK’s managed migration regime, the research will include the design and implementation of a bespoke survey conducted in partnership with Hongkongers in Britain, which aims to capture changes to legal status over time.

**Design and deliver in-depth qualitative research with Hongkongers in Britain to document the experiences of migration and settlement among young Hong Kongers newly migrating to the UK.**

The sample will include 30 young Hong Kongers living in the UK, the sample selected to reflect the diversity of this population in respect to legal status, gender, sexuality and disability. It is anticipated that the research will include in-depth interviewing and arts-based research methods, both of which have well-established benefits for conducting research with migrants and young people (Bagnoli, 2004; Erel et al, 2017). These methods will be used to examine and evidence how their experiences of growing up against the backdrop of the pro-democracy movements (a) shape their expectations and hopes for political and migrant rights in the UK and (b) influence their formal and informal political engagement and expression following migration; and to examine how their practices and actions, and the reception of these by political stakeholders are shaped by the longer history of the relationship between British Government and the people of Hong Kong. Interviews will be transcribed verbatim, imported to NVivo for thematic analysis.

**Provide research evidence that can be used within advocacy for migrant rights.** This aim will be met by working with Hongkongers in Britain to disseminate the top-level findings from the research, in ways designed to communicate with local, regional and national Government stakeholders and policy-makers.

This CASE studentship brings together a supervisory team combining research expertise—on contemporary migration governance in the UK, and specifically the Hong Kong BN(O) visa (Benson); young migrants, political activism and creative methods (Sirriyeh); activism in Hong Kong (Li)—with the policy and practical knowledge of Civil Society Organisation Hongkongers in Britain (Cheng). This supervisory team offer the student with ready access to extensive expertise on migration and citizenship as well as key stakeholder networks.

## Timeline

### **Year 1 - 2023-24**

- Training in appropriate research and communication methods, alongside any outstanding PhD requirements
- Embedding the researcher in Hongkongers in Britain
- Conducting initial statistical analysis of publicly available data on migration from Hong Kong to UK
- Working collaboratively with Hongkongers in Britain to design and implement survey and research design for qualitative phase of data collection
- Apply for ethics approval
- Complete literature review

### **Year 2 – 2024-25**

- Develop and disseminate research communications from initial data analysis tailored to the needs of voluntary sector organisations, Government stakeholders and policy makers
- Recruit research participants, conduct and complete qualitative research
- Conduct thematic analysis of qualitative data
- Participate in Hongkonger in Britain events

### Year 3 – 2025-26

- Write up PhD thesis documenting the experiences of migration and settlement among young Hong Kongers newly migrating to the UK and in particular how they approach political engagement.
- Working with Hongkongers in Britain to communicate research findings to a range of audiences. Dissemination activities are likely to include a research briefing, blogs and infographics.

With a focus on a new migration flow of significant volume, this CASE project will develop a baseline study that will inform future research in this area. In bringing together migration and migrants' political action, it makes a significant sociological contribution while also intervening in a live policy agenda around migrant (political) rights. As such the project has the potential to draw together research evidence that can critically examine routes and obstacles to political engagement among migrants in the UK today.

### References

Bagnoli, A. 2004. Researching identities with multi-method autobiographies, [Online: *Sociological Research Online*, 9(2)] Available at: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/9/2/bagnoli.html>

Benson, M., 2021. Hong Kongers and the coloniality of British citizenship from decolonisation to 'Global Britain'. *Current Sociology*, p.00113921211048530.

Erel, U., Reynolds, T. and Kaptani, E. (2017) Participatory Theatre for Transformative Social Research, *Qualitative Research*, 17(3), pp.302-312.

Ho, M.S. and Wan, W.K., 2021. Universities as an Arena of Contentious politics: mobilization and control in Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition movement of 2019. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, pp.1-24.

Isin, E.F. and Nielsen, G.M. eds., 2008. *Acts of citizenship*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Kong, Sui-Ting, Ho, Petula Sik-Ying & Jackson, Stevi (2021). Doing being observed: Experimenting with collaborative focus group analysis in post-Umbrella Movement Hong Kong. *Sociological Research Online* 26(3): 485-504.

Ku, A. S., 2020. New forms of youth activism—Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Bill movement in the local-national-global nexus. *Space and Polity*, 24(1), pp.111-117.

Lee, C.K. and Sing, M. eds., 2019. *Take back our future: An eventful sociology of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*. Cornell University Press.

McNevin, A., 2011. *Contesting Citizenship: Irregular Migrants and New Frontiers of the Political*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Sirriyeh, A., 2019. 'Felons are also our family': citizenship and solidarity in the undocumented youth movement in the US. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(1), pp. 133-155.