

NEWSLETTER



Social Issues by Kelvin Lam

A global refugee crisis has emerged in recent years and the situation has turned acute after the Arab Spring in the 2010s. As referred the United Nations, armed-conflict-induced social upheaval and persecution have aroused about 70.8 million population forcibly displaced as of 2018. As one of the signatories of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, Hong Kong is responsible for protecting the asylum seekers who are in a limbo. But for them, surviving in one of the world's costliest cities is never easy: they are entrapped by destitution and inadequate support during a prolonged period of refuge. Each asylum seeker receives not more than HK\$3,200 as monthly assistance and are prohibited from working. Most of them also do not know where to seek help within the local community.

To understand how they cope with hardship, I conducted a research with my supervisor Prof. Hua (Sara) Zhong about asylum seekers' coping strategies in Hong Kong. Having interviewed with some asylum seekers, our study revealed the importance of their social capital: most of the interviewed, with their monetary resources depleted, relied heavily on weak ties established by chance to access social support. In particular, asylum seekers tended to connect people they share commonalities with, in terms of ethnicity, religion, language and so on, in order to gain and exchange information. Language skills, as a human capital, also played a role in their coping process, by facilitating their accumulation of social networks. Based on the findings, we suggest the government to increase the amount of assistance, up to the standard that asylum seekers can fulfil their substantial needs under a skyrocketing high cost of living. We also encourage the supporting organisations to reach out to their clients who are the asylum seekers, so as to increase their opportunities of receiving social support.

Supplementary Readings:

- Mathews, Gordon. 2011. *Ghetto at the Center of the World : Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Vecchio, Francesco. 2015. *Asylum Seeking and the Global City*. Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge.

CONFERENCES

Kelvin Lam - The 115th ASA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, The United States, August 8-11, 2020.

PUBLICATIONS

- **Gan, Yumei**, Christian Greiffenhagen and Stuart Reeves. 2020. "Connecting Distributed Families: Camera Work for Three-Party Mobile Video Calls." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '20)*, New York: ACM. ([see the article](#))
- Liao, Tim and **Rebecca Yiqing Gan**. 2020. "Filipino & Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong: Their Life Courses in Migration." *American Behavioral Scientist*. ([see the article](#))

My experience as a Research Assistant by Angel Chang

COULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ACADEMIC BACKGROUND?

I did both my Bachelor's and Master's in Sociology at CUHK. Both of my undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations deal with civil society in China, specifically state-society relationship.



[See the full interview](#)

WHAT IS THE CONTRIBUTION OF A RESEARCH ASSISTANT POSITION TO AN ACADEMIC CAREER?

Personally, my next step is to do a PhD and I would like to apply mixed method in my PhD research(es). My past research experiences during my Bachelor's and Master's focused on qualitative methods.

Even though I have taken a few courses on quantitative methods before, my current RA job helps me gain insights on quantitative methods more practically and comprehensively. When I did the quantitative courses before, we did not start from designing questionnaire and step-by-step into administering surveys.

Nevertheless, the data collection steps are essential to the direction(s) of analysis in the later steps so it must be done with great care and quality. Generally speaking, I think being a RA also helps one think about their research direction and what is the specific academic field and topic that one would like to pursue.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES AS A RESEARCH ASSISTANT?

I am the project coordinator and my main responsibilities are to conduct survey interviews and coordinate our interviewers to collect 3000 and 500 surveys in Hong Kong and Macau respectively. In addition, I coordinate students to help input those data. I overlook this project to ensure the quality of the data and database is not in any way compromised.

WHAT ARE THE SWEETS AND BITTERS OF BEING A RESEARCH ASSISTANT?

As someone who is motivated towards an academic career, I would say the sweets of RA is that I can gain professional research experience on topics I am interested in and be connected with other professionals from all kinds of background - NGO, business, academic and government - that has opened up my views to how different sectors look at the same issue. Personally, I think these are very meaningful experiences to not only my career prospect, but also my personal growth. If I must say a bitter, I guess it probably would be 'uncertainty' in two ways. The first uncertainty is the data collection process while I was working on this project. Over the past year, the project has been significantly affected because of the socio-political issue in Hong Kong, followed by the coronavirus outbreak. These events have hindered the data collection progress as respondents are not as willing to participate or even criticize the project that can cause frustration. The second uncertainty is future prospect because it is unlike working stably in a company and that if you perform well, your contract gets extended and you continue to have the job, in addition to raise in salary.

RA follows a project and once a project is done, the position also ends. As far as I understand, RA salary is set for throughout the period of a project. Moreover, you can hardly bargain for a higher salary than your previous RA position because it really depends on the availability of individual project funding. Therefore, I think being a RA requires individuals to think and plan for themselves their career prospects rather than one that is readily planned by a company/government/school...etc.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

✓ **Publication opportunity:**

- Special Issue of Poetics: Measure Mohr Culture - **Submission deadline: July 17, 2020.** *Initial submissions should be attached in emails directly to the guest editors: Clayton Chidress (ccchidress@gmail.com) and Craig M. Rawlings (craig.rawlings@duke.edu).*

✓ **Job ads:**

- Postdoctoral Fellow Scheme - Universiti Brunei Darussalam, - **Application deadline: March 31, 2020.** ([*see the ad*](#))