

2015 FYP FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

2nd Prize

Rethinking “Helping Others”: Homelessness & Youth Activism

By Yuen Ka Sin Claudia

At a time when the government failed to provide sufficient social services and many marginalized groups needed to rely on NGOs and various local initiatives to fill the gap, this paper interrogated the potential and limitations of youth activism involved in self-initiated street outreach for homeless people. Grounded in a



Prof. Mathews presenting the award to Claudia at the 2015 FYP Forum

historical analysis of the housing policies and social welfare system in Hong Kong, this paper used an auto-ethnography framework to re-contextualize the relationship between ‘helpers’ and the people being ‘helped’.

The research was conducted in two field-sites: a student social service group and a homeless people gathering spot in the Eastern district. Through qualitative methods such as participant observation and individual interviews, as well as the researcher’s own experience as part of the group, the paper identified the strategies students used to overcome the boundary between the homeless people and themselves, and analyzed the subject-making of students as activists under the influence of neoliberalism. During the process, the researcher together with her informants discovered new perspectives related to engagement with homeless people and questioned the possibility of perpetuating symbolic violence on marginalized groups under the cover of kindness. Ultimately, the paper aimed to provide a constructive critique on ‘the ethics of helping others’ and problematize the notion that good deeds are inherently good. It also hoped to offer insights on alternative ways of living in cities and recognized the agency of seemingly powerless groups.