

In the Divides: Chinese migrant activisms in Hong Kong

This thesis studies two groups of Chinese migrants in Hong Kong: mainland Chinese migrant mothers in Hong Kong with their school-aged children, and elders in the Right-Of-Abode (ROA) movement advocating for their Chinese children's Hong Kong citizenship. Respectively, the 'divides' in the title refer to 1) the geopolitical divide between China and Hong Kong, and 2) the public/private divide in both activisms (for example, the important question in their advocacy about what should be counted 'public' and thus should be put into consideration by the government in policy making).

The Chinese migrant mothers' life in Hong Kong amid all kinds of political tensions in 2019, as well as their work around the visa application procedure during the Covid-19 pandemic, entail instability in face of political tension, and cultivate innovative possibility about the geopolitical divide. From their caution in the advocacy group, I observed what I called the "hypersensitivity towards politics", which constituted a true dilemma about their political participation – they had to continue their political advocacy while constantly self-distancing from any 'politics'. Furthermore, their temporary success in simplifying the visa application during the exceptional situation due to Covid-19 reminded me of the importance in the migrant experience in fostering mutual understanding in geopolitical tensions and ruptures.

Meanwhile, the elders in the ROA movement are experienced in articulating their claims through translating across the public/private divide. Different from a lot

of accusations on immigrants in Hong Kong (i.e. the elders are unclear in their mind about what should be public/private – in other words, their concerns about their mainland Chinese children are merely ‘private’ issues to be arranged and settled inside families), I would like to show that they have *alternative* conceptions about what should constitute the ‘public’, with the help of Susan Gal’s ‘fractal’ model. Furthermore, insights from the ‘fractal’ model were applied to the other divide – the geopolitical divide – to remind us that conceptual division could go on indefinitely with only one certain path. It means that the division could not itself cover both side in the division. In other words, our knowledge and understanding about the seemingly symmetrical linguistic structure (e.g. China/Hong Kong) are in fact never symmetrical. In my opinion, this disguised asymmetry might have caused a lot of problems in our current conception about the geopolitics between China and Hong Kong. It is my intention in my thesis, with the help of the elders and the migrant mothers, to reflect upon this asymmetry and the possibility to go beyond this heavily-contested divide.