

STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

██████████ Hong Kong, History (Modern)
Politics of Ethnicity in Constructing Hong Kong Identities

Social and political tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China have sharpened dramatically over the past few years, shaping the construction of what many describe as a new Hong Kong identity. Since the former British colony's handover in 1997 and the application of the "one country, two systems" principle, many Hong Kong people have resisted the mainland's influence on the city's politics, economy, and civil liberties. The proposed Occupy Hong Kong (OHK) civil disobedience movement threatens to shut down the city's financial center in July 2014 if the mainland government does not ensure fair universal suffrage in Hong Kong's upcoming 2017 Chief Executive election and the 2020 Legislative Council election. But even as many Hong Kong people define the city's identity against what they see as the mainland's orchestrated politics, racial discrimination and tensions with the city's growing population of ethnic minorities reveal another struggle with equality. In March 2013, for instance, Hong Kong's High Court ruled that foreign domestic workers are ineligible to apply for permanent residency regardless of how long they have lived there, thereby denying them voting and other rights. Other foreigners, however, are typically eligible after seven years of constant residency.¹

Most media and scholarly reports discuss Hong Kong's modern identity through the lens of political and economic changes caused by China's rising influence, with an assumption that these issues concern ethnically Chinese communities of different political beliefs. Yet this monolithic perspective ignores the city's complexity and contradictions; though many Hong Kong people are determined to maintain democracy and individual rights, many also debate which residents should qualify for these rights. My proposed research seeks instead to understand to what extent, if any, ethnic and social diversity shapes the ideologies created by political activism, and vice versa. How do political tensions with the mainland and social tensions within the city shape a new Hong Kong identity – or how do they conflict and destabilize, or even fracture, such a notion?

In *Modernity at Large* (1996), anthropologist Arjun Appadurai builds upon Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1982) to theorize new forms of identity-construction in the globalized world that base identity not solely on race, ethnicity, or location, but rather on a collective group imagination. If, as Appadurai argues, imagination rather than ethnicity shapes the basis of identity, then what imagined element undergirds the development of Hong Kong identities: shared (political) ideology, a shared language, a shared history, or – still – a shared ethnicity? For instance, can a diasporic, ethnically Chinese individual who does not speak Cantonese participate in Hong Kong politics more fully than an ethnically Indian, Cantonese-speaking individual born and raised in Hong Kong? Such questions, rooted in the development of postcolonial studies and the emergence of transnationalism as a key concept, are especially critical in Hong Kong as a hub of international trade and migration.

I will investigate several aspects of Hong Kong's identity construction over time. I plan to examine the history of race relations beginning with the 1967 riots, in which a new generation of Hong Kong people reacted to both the Cultural Revolution in China and to British colonialism;

¹ Census and Statistics Dept., *2011 Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities* (Hong Kong, Census and Statistics Dept., 2012), 7. Ethnic minorities compose 6.4% of Hong Kong's population, with Indonesians (29.6% of ethnic minorities), Filipinos (29.5%), and Whites (12.2%) comprising the largest groups. About 90% of Indonesian and Filipina women are domestic workers. The number of ethnic minorities grew by 31.2% from 2001 to 2011.

to study Hong Kong government expressions of cultural and ethnic identity (many of which are influenced by the mainland government²); and to conduct interviews with both activists and non-participants. Being in Hong Kong is critical to the success of this project due to the resources there. The library at the University of Hong Kong boasts a collection of over 200 oral histories on a variety of topics with Hong Kong people of various ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes. The organizer of OHK, [REDACTED] is also a professor at the University of Hong Kong. Being present in the city will allow me to not only observe the outcomes of OHK and other related movements, but also to hear from a variety of people at a critical point in Hong Kong's political and social history.

Upon arriving in Hong Kong, I will capitalize on the energy of OHK by dedicating my first four months to interviewing leaders and participants in political organizing. My questions will differ depending on the results of OHK; nonetheless they will investigate the issues outlined above. By working with NGOs that serve and advocate for ethnic minorities, such as Hong Kong Unison, I also plan to interview non-Chinese individuals to explore their involvement with Hong Kong politics. I will distinguish between various ethnic groups as well as different places of origin for the Chinese, while also considering how gender dynamics among Chinese and non-Chinese communities affect political participation. In the following four months I will study the history of Hong Kong's race relations using public and university libraries and archives. I will also visit museums such as the Hong Kong Museum of History and the online exhibits of the Hong Kong Memory Project to understand government-sponsored historical narratives. With this added knowledge, I will spend my last two months conducting additional or follow-up interviews, allowing me to study the four factors mentioned above – shared ideology, history, language, or ethnicity – and how they have shaped conceptions of Hong Kong identity over the past 50 years.

My previous work and research experience and my language skills have prepared me to undertake this research. Since the fall of 2011, I have interned for the Peace Center of the United University Church in Los Angeles, gaining first-hand experience in social and ethnic issues in downtown Los Angeles while engaging with local activists. In summer 2012, I studied exhibits at a government-built museum in Astana, Kazakhstan, which commemorated the women's Soviet-era gulag ALZhIR, to analyze the roles of gender and ethnicity in identity construction. In summer 2013, I spent eight weeks in Beijing taking intensive advanced Mandarin courses. I also speak conversational Cantonese as an American of Chinese descent.

I plan to work with Professor [REDACTED] in the History Department at the University of Hong Kong. His work on identity, museum studies, and social upheavals in modern Hong Kong will be invaluable resources for my own research. My time in Hong Kong will help me develop a stronger grasp of academic theory, and it will furthermore advance my Cantonese and Mandarin language skills. Afterwards, I plan to use my work to develop a proposal for graduate studies in international history involving race relations between China and the Global South.

My research will contribute toward the Fulbright goal of promoting cultural and mutual understanding in multiple ways. My analysis of Hong Kong-mainland China relations with respect to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong will share an alternative perspective on an issue of international importance that most Western media has not considered. As an observer, I will also be able to serve as a bridge between individuals of various ethnic groups in Hong Kong. Upon returning to the United States, I will continue to build upon my understanding of multicultural issues to support diversity both domestically and internationally through my graduate work.

² See John M. Carroll, "Displaying the Past to Serve the Present: Museums and Heritage Preservation in Post-Colonial Hong Kong," *Twentieth-Century China* 31.1 (November 2005), 76-103.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

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It is hard to admit—but at times I feel like a stereotype. Like many other Chinese Americans of my generation, I grew up dreading piano lessons after school and Chinese classes on Saturday, and wishing my relatives could refrain just once from taking extra napkins at McDonald's. I performed well in high school and now attend a respected university, where, right on schedule, I have experienced an identity crisis, begun exploring my roots, and discovered the fights for justice and equal rights that have made people proud to be Chinese American. In many ways, I could be an archetype of the Asian American: high-achieving and rule-following. Yet I feel uneasy at how often I am taken for and treated as one more “model minority.”

Nonetheless, being in Hong Kong, my parents' birthplace, seemed like the next logical step of self-discovery. When a USC comparative literature class offered me the chance to travel and study there in summer 2013, I jumped at the opportunity. I had felt connected to the city because of my parents' stories, but the more I learned about Hong Kong, the more I felt not only fascinated but also troubled. On one hand, many Hong Kong people struggled against mainland China's political control, calling for human rights by observing the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre every June 4th. On the other hand, many ethnic minorities from places South and Southeast Asia were struggling against Hong Kong's own forms of legalized discrimination.

My time studying contradictions and inequalities throughout history had sharpened my personal sensitivities to issues of social justice. In Hong Kong, I recognized a process that I had seen operating in the past and now again in the present. By refusing many foreign-born individuals, like the majority of domestic workers, the right to be permanent residents with voting rights and other protections, the Hong Kong government was making them into permanent foreigners. Having studied the history of the Chinese in America, having been asked where I *really* come from, having felt the weight of Otherization, I understood the hurt of being a constant outsider in a place you call home. Here was a city that espoused ideas like freedom, equality, and diversity—ideas that I believe in as an American citizen and as a Chinese American individual—and that simultaneously established the types of exclusionary practices I so deplored.

I had wanted to be in Hong Kong to discover more about my family's past, but what I encountered instead was a situation that spoke to my present concerns. Yes, Asian Americans had fought for equal rights, but now many are politically uninvolved. By remaining silent on issues that nonetheless impact our lives, we enable stereotypes like the “model minority” myth to oversimplify people of incredibly diverse backgrounds. But in my studies and community involvement, I have found that change can happen when rhetoric and images shift, allowing people to rethink what they believe and how they act. Such moments are especially powerful when multiple voices gather to create new perspectives on common issues, opportunities for mutual understanding, and possibilities for informed, inclusive, and viable solutions.

Hong Kong now is in a period where political tensions with the mainland are opening spaces for people to actively re-imagine their identities and the future of their city. Although ethnic minorities are undeniably part of both, they seem left out of the conversation. As a student and a future academic, I hope that my research in Hong Kong will increase our understanding of how identities are formed in diverse communities. But more importantly, I want my work there and in the future to broaden channels of communication, encouraging the dialogue that can make strange Other people into simply other human beings.