

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS25(16)/H05/16 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within six months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within 12 months of the approved project completion date.</p>

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Asylum-seeking journeys among refugees in Hong Kong: processes, meanings and impacts

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr. SHUM Chun-tat/ Research Assistant Professor	School of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	NA	NA
Others	NA	NA

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	1 January 2017	1 January 2017	NA
Project Completion Date	31 December 2018	30 June 2019	19 November 2018
Duration (in month)	24	30	19 November 2018
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 December 2019	30 June 2020	19 November 2018

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. It aims to provide a detailed analysis of asylum-seeking journeys from homelands to Hong Kong. Much refugee researches are concerned with what happened before the migratory decision or after the arrival of the refugees in the receiving societies. However, many refugees have undertaken multiple, long and difficult exile journeys before arriving in Hong Kong. This research intends to examine the process and characteristics of the journeys, its different meanings for and psychosocial impacts to the refugees;
2. It intends to strengthen our understanding about refugees in Hong Kong by focusing on the asylum-seeking journeys as the center of ethnography and analysis. It demonstrates the lived experience of asylum-seeking journeys which is an understudied area in forced migration and refugee studies. It also gives voice to refugees' unique experience that can contribute to academic debate of refugee journeys, life-changing meaning of displacement and refugee livelihoods;
3. It aims to develop a conceptualization of the asylum-seeking journeys by examining the processes, events, meanings and impacts of the journeys itself. The analysis of the actual exile process, its meanings for and impacts to the refugees in Hong Kong can enhance our understanding of 'who they are'. It will make an important contribution to the literature and teaching on migration and refugee studies, which is an underdeveloped field of study in Hong Kong; and
4. It intends to transfer the research experiences and new knowledge and findings into teaching Hong Kong society at the Principal Investigator's institute. It will allow students to acquire the most updated migration and refugee issues in Hong Kong and will strengthen students' caring attitude towards this migrant group in Hong Kong.

5.2 Revised objectives

NA

Date of approval from the RGC: NA

Reasons for the change: NA

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

All research objectives in the original applications have been successfully achieved. Throughout the research period, the PI and Research Assistant conducted literature review, interviews, participant observations, data analysis, and manuscript writing.

Through interviews, we identified the reasons, routes, methods of asylum-seeking journeys to Hong Kong. According to the Hong Kong Immigration Department, 5,899 people sought protection from the government by the end of 2017. Majority of claimants are from South or Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines, others come from some African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Central Republic of Africa, and Togo. This project examined the process and characteristics of the journeys, its different meanings for and psychosocial impacts to the refugees. The refugees fled their homeland due to safety and security reasons. Most research participants travelled indirectly to Hong Kong through two to four transit places, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Singapore, Bangkok, Macau, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen (China). Different means of transportation were used in the asylum-seeking journeys, including flights, trains, ferries, cars, buses, and walking. When asked about their journeys to Hong Kong, the refugees all expressed that they had managed to handle their emotions and learn tactics in order to survive their journey. Although the journey was difficult, many of them perceived this as a learning experience in their lives (Objective 1).

The research team also conducted participant observation of refugees in Hong Kong in order to understand about their everyday life difficulties, how they cope with the challenges, and how they make sense of their life in limbo. The ethnographic data was analyzed, presented and discussed in three international conferences, a book manuscript, and a peer-reviewed journal article (Objective 2).

Conceptual and theoretical discussions relevant to new research findings and policy implications for refugees in Hong Kong have been made accordingly through international conference presentations, a book manuscript, and a peer-reviewed journal article. The PI developed the concepts of “asylum-seeking journeys”, “embodied bordering”, “emotional encounter”, and “spiritual asylum”, which contributed to the academic debate of refugee journeys, life-changing meaning of displacement and refugee livelihoods (Objective 3). In order to allow general public to have better understanding of “who the refugees are” in Hong Kong, the PI also presented research findings in a public seminar organized by African Centre Hong Kong (Objective 3).

The PI also transferred the research experiences and new knowledge and findings of this project to teaching courses related to globalization and development at the PI’s University (Objective 4). The students were required to complete and submit an individual assessment task regarding how underdevelopment of the third world triggered migration. The PI also delivered a talk on refugee issues in Hong Kong in a University event (Objective 4).

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	Addressed (please tick)	Percentage Achieved (please estimate)
1. It aims to provide a detailed analysis of asylum-seeking journeys from homelands to Hong Kong. Much refugee researches are concerned with what happened before the migratory decision or after the arrival of the refugees in the receiving societies. However, many refugees have undertaken multiple, long and difficult exile journeys before arriving in Hong Kong. This research intends to examine the process and characteristics of the journeys, its different meanings for and psychosocial impacts to the refugees;	✓	100%
2. It intends to strengthen our understanding about refugees in Hong Kong by focusing on the asylum-seeking journeys as the center of ethnography and analysis. It demonstrates the lived experience of asylum-seeking journeys which is an understudied area in forced migration and refugee studies. It also gives voice to refugees' unique experience that can contribute to academic debate of refugee journeys, life-changing meaning of displacement and refugee livelihoods;	✓	100%
3. It aims to develop a conceptualization of the asylum-seeking journeys by examining the processes, events, meanings and impacts of the journeys itself. The analysis of the actual exile process, its meanings for and impacts to the refugees in Hong Kong can enhance our understanding of 'who they are'. It will make an important contribution to the literature and teaching on migration and refugee studies, which is an underdeveloped field of study in Hong Kong; and	✓	100%
4. It intends to transfer the research experiences and new knowledge and findings into teaching Hong Kong society at the Principal Investigator's institute. It will allow students to acquire the most updated migration and refugee issues in Hong Kong and will strengthen students' caring attitude towards this migrant group in Hong Kong.	✓	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

Understanding asylum-seeking journeys

This project acknowledged the critical insights of feminist migration scholars that mobility is always embodied and relational. In the context of asylum-seeking journeys, it is in and through the encounters that borders and refugees come into being as such. It is a particular person in a particular body who tries to both navigate mobility and negotiate immobility in his/her encounters with the migration regimes, officials, people, objects, and environment throughout the journeys, that contribute to the formation of what the PI called “embodied bordering”. It is the interplay of physical and inner-world journeys to asylum. (Attachment 1, Part C8 and Attachment 3, Part C9).

1. Physical journeys

Most research participants stressed that they foresaw their lives would be in danger if they stayed in their home countries. They mentioned that they were internally displaced in their home countries for months and years before they fled their countries, and admitted that it was a difficult decision to leave their families and countries. They often stressed that they had no choice and were forced to leave; otherwise, their life would be in danger. Most research participants travelled indirectly to Hong Kong through two to four transit places, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Singapore, Bangkok, Macau, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen (China). Most African research participants entered Hong Kong via China because of the visa-free policy between their home countries and China. For South Asian research participants, they mainly entered Hong Kong through Macau, Shenzhen, or Guangzhou. Different means of transportation were used in the asylum-seeking journey, including flights, trains, ferries, cars, buses, and walking. Cars, buses, and walking were primarily used to travel from their hometown to an airport in their home country, or to cross the border. They were all well aware of the techniques and embodied signs that could help them to successfully enter a host society. More importantly, they had learned that every step towards the goal of seeking protection overseas required struggle, resilience, and persistence. This strong awareness was one example of their incredible commitment to the goal of seeking asylum abroad. Exiting in response to unbearable repression and persecution, as the PI argued, is an expressive form of political acts against the legitimacy of their home government (Attachment 1, Part C8).

2. Inner-world journeys

The research participants used the words “afraid”, “worried”, “confused”, “sad”, and “panic” to describe their physical movement across various borders and life in limbo. Seeking protection in a host society is an emotionally charged event. During their stay in Hong Kong, the refugees experienced a wide array of challenges and constraints. They always described not having enough food to eat and lacking proper accommodation after arrival. In this way, they experienced more material insecurities, showing that their presence in Hong Kong did not automatically make them feel more secure. Uncertainty and insecurity were often directly linked to their poor psychosocial wellbeing. The concept of “emotional encounter” is developed to explain how these journeys create uncertainties which influence their well-being (Attachment 1, Part C8 and Attachment 5, Part C9). From experiencing physical insecurity in the country of origin to economic and material insecurity in the host society, identity represents an important part of this process. Many research participants used religion to redefine their positive sense of self, which is central to their well-being. It is clear that religion helps individuals find their purpose in life and provides spiritual comfort. What is interesting in this research is that prolonged displacement, an entirely negative experience, has actually provided spaces and resources for enhancing refugees’ religious learning and spiritual beliefs. “Spiritual asylum” is a conceptual tool to understand how the emotional experiences of refugees are influenced by religious teachings during prolonged displacement. From worried thoughts to hopeful attitudes, spiritual asylum nurtures members’ perseverance to weather difficult times until God brings them a good future (Attachment 2, Part C8).

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

In this completed project, the PI argues that the refugees in Hong Kong demonstrated their agentic ability to navigate and negotiate mobility and immobility in a transnational space. The refugees have various degrees of network connections. Although they are stuck in limbo, they are all active agents in social fields to different degrees and scales. When it comes to economic activities, the refugees acted as a nexus between different buyers and sellers, especially in the informal recycling businesses in low-income living districts e.g. Sham Shui Po. Over the years, I observed that quite a large number of these low-end business transactions were facilitated by refugees and regular migrants in Hong Kong. The findings from this completed project regarding the economic livelihoods of refugees in Hong Kong raised two important follow-up questions for a new proposed research project: what of the deprivation afflicting ethnic minorities operating in the recycling businesses and informal economy? Is there anything to be done by the government about it?

As an immigrant city, people of various ethnic origins are attracted to work or live in Hong Kong. Many of them, especially those from South Asia and Africa, have encountered serious challenges in adaptation and integration into the community, and are perceived as being more disadvantaged and impoverished. Hong Kong government has highlighted in the census report 2018 that poverty is a serious problem facing South Asian and African minorities. They are mainly engaged in grassroots positions such as waste and recycling businesses. By exploring the exchange relations between different social actors in the recycling businesses in Hong Kong, the PI is planning to conduct a research project with a tentative title of “Urban poverty and informal economy: waste trading businesses of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong”. The PI is preparing a FDS grant proposal for the funding application 2021/22.

7. Layman’s Summary

(*Describe in layman’s language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words*)

This project investigated the actual asylum-seeking process from homelands to Hong Kong. Today, refugees undertake multiple, long, and life-threatening journeys before arriving in receiving societies; from the moment of arrival in Hong Kong, they face a wide array of challenges. An ethnographic account of how refugees navigate and negotiate their journeys to asylum, this project highlights the social, political, economic, and psychological processes involved in “becoming” and “being” a refugee. This encompasses not only the physical movement of refugees, but also their embodiments and emotional encounters. The project has offered a micro-level analysis of asylum-seeking journeys—from the aspiration to flee, to migration preparation, to border crossing, to homemaking in prolonged displacement. All of these stages reveal how these journeys create ever-evolving realities with new constellations of options and constraints. By focusing on refugees’ understanding, perception of, and interaction with the people, environments, and situations around them, this project has illustrated how refugee life plans are shaped and reshaped by the embodied experience of their journeys, and how their ideas of home have changed over time. It has offered policy implication to the government who can shape the humanitarian policies that are more responsive to the refugee experience.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2019				Shum Chun-tat*	Asylum-seeking Journeys in Asia: Refugees in Hong Kong and Bangkok, London: Routledge	No	Yes [Attachment 1]	Yes	Yes
		✓		Shum Chun-tat*	Conceptualizing spiritual asylum: Security, emotion, and spiritual well-being of Christian refugees in Hong Kong, Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies	No	Yes [Attachment 2]	Yes	No

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
20-22 February 2018 University of Otago, New Zealand	Embodied bordering in the journeys to asylum: an ethnographic research on refugees in Hong Kong	Global Migrations Conference 2018, by Centre for Global Migrations	No	Yes [Attachment 3]	Yes	Yes
28-29 March 2019 University of Sheffield, UK	Asylum-seeking journeys: transnational migration, embodiment and emotional encounters among refugees in Hong Kong	IMISCOE Spring Conference: Transforming Mobility and Immobility: Brexit and Beyond	No	Yes [Attachment 4]	Yes	Yes
22 June 2019 The University of Hong Kong, China	Emotional encounters in prolonged displacement: emotional well-being of refugees and anxiety refugee governance structure in Hong Kong	Society For Hong Kong Studies Annual Conference 2019	No	Yes [Attachment 5]	Yes	Yes

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

In the academic year of 2018-19, the PI taught two courses that were related to globalization and development at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The PI successfully transferred research experience and new findings of refugee migration to teaching lecture topics regarding globalization, development and the relations between developed and developing countries. In the courses, the students were required to complete and submit a short individual assessment task regarding how underdevelopment of the third world triggered migration.

11. Student(s) Trained*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
NA			

12. Other Impact*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

NA

13. Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
					Type	No.
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	1	3	1 scholarly book	0	NA	NA

14. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
NA	NA