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Project Title: Lifestyle Migration in East Asia: A Comparative Study of British and Asian Lifestyle Migrants

HK Principal Investigator: Dr Maggy Shuk Yi Lee (The University of Hong Kong)

UK Principal Investigator: Prof Karen O'Reilly (Loughborough University)

The project examines the motivations, experiences and outcomes of lifestyle migration as a contemporary form of mobility in Asia. Lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals, moving part- or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to destinations which, for a variety of reasons, signify a better quality or pace of life. They are not moving for purposes of work; they are not labour migrants, refugees or asylum seekers; nor are they corporate elites, intellectuals or expatriates. They are of all ages, although many of them seem to be close to, or over, retirement age. The fundamental features of the different lifestyles sought include 'making a fresh start', re-negotiating the work-life balance, quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints. So what might lifestyle migration mean in societies that do not share the same cultural understandings of 'a good life'? How do men and women make sense of and re-negotiate their work-life balance and freedom from prior constraints? How is lifestyle being transformed where cultural understandings of leisure and consumption differ in Asia and the West?

The project addresses these questions through a comparative study of British lifestyle migrants to a number of Asian destinations (People's Republic of China, Thailand and Malaysia), and Hong Kong lifestyle migrants to mainland China. According to the UK Institute for Public Policy Research, an estimated 5.5 million British nationals live overseas permanently (equivalent to 9.2 per cent of the UK's population). In addition, around 500,000 British people live abroad for part of the year. This means that nearly one in ten British nationals lives part or all of the year abroad, especially through second home ownership. Significantly, increasing numbers of British migrants have been attracted to Asia on a permanent or part-time basis. Similarly, cross-border lifestyle mobility has also impacted on Asian migrants. There is growing evidence of cross-border movement between Hong Kong and mainland China, as people from different class backgrounds adopt this as an active strategy to improve their way of life and to enjoy a lower cost of living.

We will examine this important social phenomenon primarily through interviews with British and Hong Kong lifestyle migrants and other relevant online data, and interviews with professionals working with or for lifestyle migrants in formal and informal roles.