

# Narrative of Governing Emigration: A case study in Hong Kong

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# Introduction

- Media narratives sometimes are used by the government to frame and define issues, even to influence citizens' perceptions of the issues.
  - seen as a means to maintain or regain control of the manner in which the unfolding event should be interpreted
- Media narratives, especially newspaper reports, represent the attention of various institutional actors in the society beyond the government, or the thinking of key opinion leaders on how they want the event to be seen by the public.
  - These actors may coordinate with and complement the government efforts, or they may be in conflict with the government as they present their views to the public.



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# Introduction

- Research on migration often focuses on the perception or sentiment of local residents when there are large waves of immigration or emigration.
- Few observers realize that their views can be influenced by the narratives of government, various institutional actors, and/or key opinion leaders in the society.
- Without fully understanding the narratives that shape their views, we cannot grasp the full picture of the way that local residents form opinions and sentiments about immigration issues.



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# Introduction

- Our analysis focuses on the media narratives in Hong Kong about emigration in the past two years during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The general public discourse usually suggests that the recent wave of emigration is related to the large-scale social unrest in 2019 and the perceived societal changes that followed.
- We explored two questions raised by this situation.
  - what are the major themes of the narratives of the government, other institutional actors, and key opinion leaders that help to reshape the common public view of the emigration wave?
  - How do the narratives legitimize the points of view they are promoting?



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# Introduction

- Theoretically, the discussion illustrates how the government handles issues related to migration by re-framing the issues. Though our study is about emigration, the findings also have implications for times when a society faces a large wave of immigration or refugees or other social crises.
- Through the media, the government provides justification for its policies.
- Our analysis, based on newspaper articles in Hong Kong, identifies five major themes:
  - minimizing the significance of the emigration wave,
  - reporting negative experiences of emigrants,
  - asserting that all consequences of the emigration wave are under control,
  - describing negative consequences for the families of those who left Hong Kong, and
  - urging citizens to treasure what we have.



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# The Framing of an Emigration Wave

- The government commonly communicates through media to deliver messages that legitimize their migration policies.
- Institutional actors need to use media to express their positions to persuade the public, and opinion leaders use media to express their views with hopes of asserting their influence.
- If the positions of newspapers are largely tilted towards the government's view in a society, all these different actors will play a similar role to support similar positions but from different angles.



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# The Framing of an Emigration Wave

- The significant consequences of framing are to shape the attitude and behavior of individuals.
  - “strategic social construction” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998)
  - shape shared meanings and interpretations of events
- These actors then develop “frames,” which are aspects of perceived reality made more prominent, and connect them with storylines.
  - Successful storylines organize experiences, enabling a new understanding of the problem
- These actors then develop “frames,” which are aspects of perceived reality made more prominent, and connect them with storylines.
  - Successful storylines organize experiences, enabling a new understanding of the problem



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# The Framing of an Emigration Wave

- While there has been considerable research on political actors framing migration-related events, many such studies have focused on immigration (Bocskor, 2018; Kissová, 2018; Pattison, 2022), with relatively little discussion about the ways that political actors frame emigration.
- The impact of emigration on sending societies should not be underestimated.
- Mass emigration of highly qualified residents, often referred to as “brain drain” when considered problematic, can have long-term effects on the development of sending societies, including the depletion of human capital and restriction of economic growth.



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# Contextualizing Emigration from Hong Kong After the 2019 Social Movement

- Hong Kong has witnessed a significant wave of emigration in the wake of the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement and the introduction of the National Security Law in mid-2020.
- According to data from the Census and Statistics Department, the local population experienced a 3% decline between in mid-2019 and mid-2022, decreasing from 7.52 million to 7.29 million
- The Hong Kong government's recent Policy Address disclosed a reduction in the local workforce by approximately 140,000 over the past two years.
  - These figures are notable for Hong Kong, which has a population of 7.5 million.
  - It is expected that this trend of emigration will persist, as Hong Kong and other places around the world have eased COVID-19 restrictions and lifted border controls.



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# Contextualizing Emigration from Hong Kong After the 2019 Social Movement

- Concurrently, the British government introduced the new British National (Overseas) visa, allowing Hong Kong residents who were formerly British Overseas Territories citizens to live, work, and study in the United Kingdom.
- After residing there for five years, they could apply for permanent residence (The Migration Observatory, 2020).
- Australia and Canada also offered pathways for recent graduates from Hong Kong or individuals holding British National (Overseas) passports to work and settle in their countries (Australian Government, 2021; Government of Canada, 2021).



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# Contextualizing Emigration from Hong Kong After the 2019 Social Movement

- With relaxed immigration requirements and societal changes, many Hong Kong residents opted to emigrate. Their intentions to emigrate were further fuelled by the reduced cost of emigration, due to various programs implemented by other countries to ease the financial burden for Hong Kong residents relocating, and concerns about repression for those actively involved in the protest movement.
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# Contextualizing Emigration from Hong Kong After the 2019 Social Movement

- Amid the increasing emigration wave in Hong Kong, we are interested in analyzing how the government either portrays the situation as a non-issue or re-frames it as a problem, and in exploring the underlying reasons for these approaches



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# Data and Methods

- News articles published by five mainstream Chinese -language newspapers in Hong Kong: Apple Daily (ceased publication in June 24, 2021), Oriental Daily News, Ming Pao, Sing Tao Daily News, and HK01
- They were selected for our analysis because of their significant reader share, which collectively provides a comprehensive understanding of various storylines.
- With the exception of Apple Daily, which covered only one-third of the period under study, all these newspapers took a position similar to the government.
- covered news articles from January 2020 to December 2022



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# Data and Methods

- WiseNews platform and searched for articles containing two sets of keywords either in the title or content: “emigration wave (移民潮)” or both “Hong Kong (香港)” and “migration (移民).”
- This process yielded a final sample of 12,120 news articles.
- We used newspaper coverage because it shows how two types of institutional actors see and explain the emigration phenomenon.



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# Data and Methods

- First, the government uses newspapers to disseminate information, including explanations for events that have occurred.
  - Information from the government may be communicated through official government reports and in statements from government officials and representatives.
  - Many news stories are built around quotes from these sources.
- Second, the opinion leaders of the society use newspapers to share their views about the emigration phenomenon through press conferences, interviews, letters to editors, or their own newspaper columns.
  - Their views can be seen as representing public intellectuals and/or public opinion (Dimaggio, Nag, and Blei (2013)). They usually are able to affect and shape the views of the public.



# Data and Methods

- Although newspaper readership has declined, DiMaggio, Nag, and Blei (2013) argued that newspapers still are perceived as a common source of news. Many newspaper reports were cited or circulated among various media outlets in Hong Kong.
- Thus, newspapers still can be seen as priming the position of government and opinion leaders. Even though some individuals may not follow the news, the repetition of a story helps to form their views of an event.



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# Data and Methods

- We first read data in pdf format, keeping only Chinese characters and saving them in txt format.
  - Unlike English LDA projects, where each word is separated by a space in a sentence, we had to segment Chinese words using Chinese word segmentation toolkits.
  - This study uses the package “jieba” to segment sentences. Some words do not carry much meaning. The work filters such stopwords by importing the stopword list from the library “stopwordsiso.”
  - Moreover, the function in “jieba” keeps only nouns, verbs, and adverbs, so the meaningless parts of speech are removed.



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# Data and Methods

- We then created a dictionary containing all the words that remained. LDA creates a bag of words that contains all the words appearing in the cleaned documents.
- Each unique word is assigned a unique identification number. However, we removed the words ['香港','移民','港人','潮'] from the dictionary because they were the words we used to choose the articles.
- For each document, LDA creates a term frequency matrix to record how many times each word appears in the text (i.e., the bag-of-words vectorization).
- We created a term frequency dictionary for each document.



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# Data and Methods

- We ran the LDA model with Gensim Parameters to tune for LDA models include the number of topics, chunksize, alpha, eta, passes, etc. This work tunes only the number of topics and keeps the remaining parameters to the default value in Gensim.
- We used a coherence score with “u\_mass” to evaluate the model and we propose that the optimal number of topics is 5.
  - The idea of topic coherence is to assess how well the underlying text data support the topic, especially investigating the co-occurrence frequency of words belonging to the same topic in the body of the the text being analyzed.
  - Gensim supports four kinds of coherence scores: 'u\_mass,' 'c\_v,' 'c\_uci,' and 'c\_npmi.'
  - Given that there are some known problems with c\_v, we adopted u\_mass, which is the second most popular index.



# Data and Methods

- “The main idea of  $u\_mass$  is that the probability of a top word occurring should be higher if a document already contains a higher order top word of the same topic.” (Mimno et al 2011).
- A higher coherence score usually represents a better model.
- We ran LDA models with the number of topics ranging from 3 to 14 and propose that the optimal number of topics is 5, with coherence reaching -0.01177.



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# Theme 1: Minimizing the Significance of the Emigration Wave

- The announcement from the Secretary for Labor and Welfare, Mr. Chris Sun, that the working population between ages 25 and 30 increased by 19,500 persons in the third quarter of 2022, but the increase was lower than 2 years before.
- When an accident occurred at a concert in July 2022, community members voiced the opinion that it was due to the lack of skilled workers. Columnists repudiated the argument that the accident was the consequence of large numbers of skilled workers leaving Hong Kong, stating that such interpretation was wrong and unreasonable.



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# Theme 1: Minimizing the Significance of the Emigration Wave

- A news report in March 2022 commented that survey results indicating that a high percentage of residents in Hong Kong intended to emigrate might be biased because of the wording of the questions, and therefore the survey results should not be taken too seriously.
- An alternative explanation that the majority of emigrants left Hong Kong because they preferred to stay in mainland China, which had better COVID-19 policies. This explanation implies that those people will return when COVID-19 is over.



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# Theme 2 Reporting Negative Experiences of Emigrants

- described a gloomy picture of emigrants as people who have lost their homes and sailed to the unknown “angry sea.”
- negative experiences back home due to emigration. For example, there was an article about a well-known opinion leader on internet who moved to Taiwan and was going to sell his house in Hong Kong.
- comments about individuals who emigrate. One article suggested that emigration is for those who are not satisfied with their career development in Hong Kong.



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# Theme 3: Asserting that All Consequences of the Emigration Wave are Under Control

- The negative consequences for the home society
- Although people emigrated and many sold their houses, the news stories reported that housing values did not drop, partly because of the government policy to maintain price stability
- Labor market had not been affected, largely due to policies recently introduced by the Hong Kong government.
- The government addressed the current teacher shortage by issuing certificates to a large number of non-certified teachers to replace the certified teachers who left Hong Kong. This flexibility of regulations initiated by the government helped to maintain a steady number of teachers in schools
- The number of applicants to universities could drop due to emigration, but the government has not reduced the funding or admission quota for universities.



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# Theme 4: Describing Negative Consequences for the Families of Those who Left Hong Kong

- Home owners lost tremendously as they sold their homes quickly prior to emigration. Their immediate family members left in Hong Kong could not have the benefit of a vacant home.
- Emigrants experience a diasporic relationship with family members back home. They have difficulty maintaining close ties with their family members. Senior members left in Hong Kong may experience loneliness and helplessness
- The descriptions of seniors having difficulty invoke the image that emigrants are not fulfilling their family responsibilities, especially as sons or daughters.



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# Theme 5: Urging Citizens to Treasure What They Have

- Articles constantly reminded people that they should treasure the current social stability as it took a lot of effort to suppress the unrest.
- Another report pointed out that stability had returned and that because many children had moved elsewhere, many elite schools in Hong Kong were recruiting new students. This was an unusual opportunity, and parents should prepare documents for their children to apply.
- Some articles suggested explicitly that, since COVID-19 has resulted in many people suffering or dying, people should treasure what they have and enjoy being with friends and close relationships



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# Conclusion

- Media narratives are important to understand how various actors in society intend to shape public views.
- As we usually explore the sentiment of local residents towards various issues, including immigration or emigration, it is important to understand any important force that shapes their views.
- We identified 5 major themes in news reports, which highlight the strategies taken to explain the emigration event.
- First, some of the reports establish that their views are based on statistics. It is significant that their collected data highlight the importance of creating credibility for the views proposed. At the same time, they provide legitimacy for the arguments suggested.



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# Conclusion

- Second, the narrative downplays the negative effect of the emigration wave. At the same time, the stories also emphasize that the government has been doing a great job to minimize any negative effects.
- Third, the narrative links to ordinary daily life and provides personal stories about the negative experiences of emigrants in their new destinations and the suffering of their family members left behind. Readers can easily relate these stories to their own daily lives.
- Finally, the narrative points out the positive aspects of remaining in Hong Kong. as the current environment in Hong Kong is good and people should treasure and enjoy it. The narrative implies that people should not anticipate that things will be better if they emigrate.



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# Conclusion

- The narrative suggests that the current situation in Hong Kong is “business as usual,” and people should think twice about emigrating. Such narratives can affect how local residents view the consequences of the recent emigration wave and may steer the government away from possible crisis.



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Thank you

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