

The Transformation of Citizenship in Post-handover Hong Kong

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About the speaker

Dr. Ying Xia is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Sun Yat-sen University. Her research interests include citizenship and contentious politics of mainland China and Hong Kong.

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Abstract

The British colonial rule inscribed a passive citizenship in Hong Kong with its de-politicized and de-nationalized governing strategies. Central to this passive citizenship is a political subject featured by individualism, political apathy and economical self-reliance. Attachment to the nation as well as to the local community was basically absent in the notion of colonial citizenship. The end of colonial rule in 1997 and the reconfiguration of Hong Kong as the Special Administrative Region of China embarked on a political project of redefining citizenship in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong SAR government intended to enhance the national identity of the Hong Kong people. But meanwhile, it also largely inherited the passive citizenship from the colonial rule, discouraging political participation while promoting individualism. Nevertheless, the new political structure of HKSAR has in effect empowered the Hong Kong people. While the public demand for further democratization increases, the tension between the government's citizenship project and the society's own preference escalates. Instead of being willingly incorporated into the government citizenship project, the civil society has been actively organizing a counter-movement to articulate a participatory citizenship. The findings indicate that citizenship formation is by no means merely a statist project, especially when the state lacks political legitimacy. Instead, it is an outcome of complex struggles between the state and the society.

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