

Typology of Immobility: The Decisions of Younger Stayers in Hong Kong

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Abstract

The recent emigration wave in Hong Kong was sparked by fears of shrinking freedom following the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement and the enactment of the National Security Law in 2020. While much attention has been given to those who chose to migrate (mobility), this study shifts the focus to the often-overlooked majority who chose to stay (immobility), challenging the prevailing "mobility bias" in migration literature. Employing the aspiration-capability model—where aspiration refers to the preference to migrate and capability refers to the resources that enable migration—this study creates a typology of younger stayers in Hong Kong, based on their immobility decisions and the factors influencing them. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, with qualitative findings informing a crosssectional survey (N=1,066) targeting individuals aged 18-39 who did not plan to emigrate within the next three years. Cluster analysis, using hierarchical and k-means techniques on standardized aspiration and capability scores, was conducted to identify distinct groups of stayers. The findings reveal three groups of younger stayers: Voluntary Immobility (37.0%), characterized by low aspiration, high capability, and a stable intention to stay; Acquiescent Immobility (34.6%), exhibiting low aspiration, low capability, and a stable intention to stay; and Involuntary Immobility (28.3%), characterized by high aspiration, moderate capability, and a decreasing intention to stay. The study also examines various retain and repel factors shaping the decision-making process. These findings contribute new empirical knowledge to the emerging field of immobility and inform the development of retention and wellbeing policies.

Keywords: acquiescent; aspiration-capability model; (im)mobility; involuntary; voluntary