

Research Apprenticeship Program 2023-24

Project List

Government-Business Relationships in China: A Sociological Analysis of Corruption Incidents

Mentor: Fan Fu

Description:

Why do officials engage in corruption? Is it purely for financial gain, or are there other social motivations? What role do businessmen play in this process? Do they initiate contact with officials, or are they compelled by them? What types of benefits do they offer to officials?

Exploring these questions is crucial for a deeper understanding of both official corruption and government-business relationships. This research delves into confessions from Chinese government officials to shed light on how their actions are influenced by social networks and value systems. The study employs a combination of qualitative methods rooted in grounded theory and computational approaches like text analysis to provide insights into these dynamics.

Migrants, Migration Industry, and Online Spaces: Creating Migration Knowledge and Its Effects

Mentor: Dasom Lee

Description:

This research builds up on my ongoing doctoral research on studying the role of migration industry actors in migrant incorporation before they arrive at their destination. This research will study how migrants, individuals in the host society who are in close relationships with the migrants such as families or employers, and migration industry actors share emotions and knowledge around migration preparation, navigating immigration restrictions, and their relative positionality on online spaces.

The purpose of this research is to understand how the online space works as a place for creating alternative knowledge while possibly reproducing racialized notions around immigrants and destinations. This project takes the case of Vietnam to other destination countries such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Examples of the online spaces we will look at include Facebook groups for prospective student migrants, YouTube videos of marriage migrant brokers, and online communities of husbands of marriage migrants, etc.

Towards a Crowdsourced Construction of Facts

Mentor: Elena De leo

Description:

The advent of the Internet and new technologies broadens participation in the process of knowledge production, with critical social and epistemic implications. Using data from social media platforms, this project explores how crowds of users collectively construct facts online.

Islamic Preschools in Istanbul, Turkey

Mentor: Tasemin Taskin Alp

Description:

Why did Islamic preschools emerge and expand in Turkey in the last decade? This mixed-method project answers this question by examining qualitative and quantitative data on Islamic preschools and early education: interviews, statistics, policy documents, and big data scraped from newspapers.

Despite the expansion of early education for five year old children in the last few years, percentage of 3-5 year old children who can access early education in Turkey is below the OECD average. Furthermore, the literature on early education suggests women's empowerment parallels the expansion of early education. However, women's participation to the labor force in Turkey has consistently been around 30% in the last two decades, a period characterized by the escalating cultural conservatism of an authoritarian regime.

A decade ago, Islamic early education centers for three to six-year-old children gained popularity in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Women played a pivotal role initiating preschools to serve their communities using various means, such as allocating a room in their apartments or collaborating with Islamic organizations. Notably, the current government and local authorities not only permitted but actively endorsed and coopted these institutions, labeling them as community-based education models—akin to their approach with other forms of informal social services.

This project looks into these preschools as a form of a social policy measure, and explains why and how this form of early education prevailed by focusing on the case of Istanbul.

A Study of Megachurches and Diversity

Mentor: Andrea Garcia

Description:

Scholars have long explored the intersection of race, gender, and religion in the United States. The megachurch phenomenon and the accompanying megachurch movement (MCM) are spaces where racial and gender dynamics unfold, profoundly impacting evangelicalism and the broader religious landscape. The significant influence of megachurches on Protestantism, more generally, underscores the pressure for these organizations to exemplify and approximate specific levels of racial and gender diversity. Megachurch leaders set the standard for churches across denominations and less formal church networks, both directly and indirectly, in virtually every city and region (Bird & Thumma, 2020). Their influence as trendsetters extends beyond the confines of their own congregations into the broader religious community in the United States.

The MCM is distinct from standard congregations in its congregational and architectural size, along with its use of modern technology, commercial strategies, and charismatic pastor figures (Dougherty et al., 2015; Hunt, 2019). Moreover, the movement distinguishes itself through its aim to present the Christian gospel message as relevant to contemporary life and reflective of the prevailing cultural environment (Dougherty et al., 2015; Hunt, 2019). The MCM thereby merits separate study, particularly with respect to dimensions of race and gender diversity. Furthermore, the sociology of religion has yet to extensively focus on the online presence of religious institutions. Church websites, typically the first impression for church visitors, may prove valuable in indicating the perceived diversity of the church, reflecting the ideology or nature of the congregation.

The Making of Cultural Heritage in 21st-Century Taipei

Mentor: Yen-Ting Hsu

Description:

Urban conservation and redevelopment constitute two integral aspects of contemporary global cities. When cities embark on revising existing land use plans, the challenge emerges of selecting which old buildings to preserve and which to replace. In response, many global cities have established a cultural heritage review process to guide these decisions, assigning privileged heritage status to chosen buildings based on their historical, aesthetic, and societal significance. This designation ensures their continued presence in the cityscape through the exercise of public power. However, the existing literature falls short in providing a systematic sociological examination of heritage production in the era of neoliberalism. Yen-Ting's project addresses this gap by delving into the urban politics and governance underlying the making of cultural heritage in 21st-century Taipei.

Considering city decisions as the outcome variable, the project aims to

- (1) Explore the discursive boundary distinguishing old buildings designated as heritage from those deemed non-heritage,
- (2) Employ regression models to best predict stakeholders' influence on policy outcomes, and
- (3) Emphasize the conditions under which the heritage-making process can protect public properties from a privatized, neoliberal future through a comparative case study.

The Rise of Femicide in Latin American Feminist Movements: Pathways to the Making of a New Political Issue

Mentor: Ana Lopez Ricoy

Description:

Although femicide is not a novel phenomenon—female murders have happened throughout history—they have become a relevant public issue in the past twenty years, especially in the Spanish speaking world. This project seeks to answer: How and did femicide become such a central political issue in Latin America and what is its significance today?

More specifically, we will be centering on cultural communities and their contribution to making femicide into a political issue. In this part of the research, we will be looking at how communities of artists in specific contexts, such as the US-Mexico border, have brought attention to femicide.

It entails doing archival research on artists, exhibition, cultural products, etc. In addition, we will be reaching out to the artists, undergoing interviews, transcribing and analyzing them.

The Price of the Past: Monetary Redress for Victims of the Taiwan February 28 Incident

Mentor: Hyangseon Irene Ahn

Description:

This research project seeks to examine what construct meaningful monetary reparations in the context of historical injustices, with a focus on East Asian regions.

It will undertake a comparative analysis between the reparations for the Jeju April 3 Incident in South Korea and the Taiwan February 28 Incident. However, in this project, by focusing on Taiwan case, the core objective is to dissect the processes involved in claiming, defining, negotiating, and implementing reparations, with an interest in the development and enactment of legal frameworks.

The empirical data for this study will be gathered from newspaper archives spanning from the 1980s to 2010. Furthermore, the project will be enriched by semi-structured interviews and participant observation at related organizations and social events within in the San Diego area, offering a nuanced perspective on the contemporary relevance of historical redress mechanisms.

A Generation in Search of Hope: Youth Social Movements and Youth Identity in Post-2010 South Korea

Mentor: Eunchong Cho

Description:

This study explores the emergence of "youth" as a significant political identity in South Korea after 2010. Neoliberal policies implemented in 1997 led to increased housing and job insecurity among the 'Cheon-Nyeon' youth demographic. In response, a diverse group of young individuals with both liberal and conservative leanings united to address their unique concerns compared to other generations. They aimed to establish "youth" as a political concept and actively engaged in the policymaking process, eventually leading to the passage of the Framework Act on Youth in 2020. However, the institutionalization of youth identity became a source of contention as some political actors attempted to manipulate it for their own interests, causing divisions within the youth movement. This research aims to construct a chronological framework, understanding both the structural conditions and the subjective processes that contributed to the shaping of youth identity.

I am presently in the process of collecting pilot data for preliminary analysis, which involves conducting interviews with young activists and politicians as well as text data, including policy documents and news articles, to facilitate computational analysis in the later stages of my research.

Semantic Network Analyses on Media Discourse on Refugees in Germany

Mentor: Min Ji Kim

Description:

The project involves collecting a corpus of German-language newspaper and journalistic articles and news report transcripts on Syrian and Ukrainian refugees through the Nexis Lexis database. Then, we will apply various computational textual analysis models on this corpus of data, principally semantic network analysis but also topic modelling and sentiment analysis. The objective of the project is to determine and visualize the representation of refugees and asylum seekers in German media discourse, as well as the German public's attitudes, over time and between two different groups in a comparative framework.