Research Questions

- What is the emancipatory agenda of postmodernism?
- Did past decades witness an expansion in average people's political rights in the global North, while there has been a rapid decline in their economic rights (or gains)?
- Is there a corresponding relationship between the voguishness of the postmodern agenda of emancipation and what people have experienced in terms of their rights in reality?

Postmodernity and Postmodernism

- Postmodernity: a historical era that has succeeded modernity since the 1970s.
- The succession is captured in a series of meteoric socioeconomic transformations of society, including the invention of computers and new technologies, new ways of communications, "time-space compression," the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, and an increased flexibility of capital accumulation (Harvey, 1990).
- Postmodernism is the cultural reflection of the dramatic change in the technological, economic, and communications sectors of contemporary society.
- The postmodern notion of emancipation has shifted from the economic realm such as wealth redistribution to the cultural and political realms such as identity and recognition.

Results

- Over the last decades, there has been a massive decline of the influence of Marxism within the intellectual community, and a soaring popularity of Foucault and postmodernism.
- Simultaneously, there has been an augmented interest in cultural and political matters and diminished concern on economic issues (as the graphs on the right display).
- In congruence, from the literature review, I found that people's political and economic rights in reality have moved toward the same direction as they did in the theoretical world – that there is an expansion in their political rights and a contraction in their economic rights (or gains).
- This suggests a triadic interrelationship among trending popularity of Marxism and postmodernism, shifted concerns from economic issues to cultural and political matters, and the alteration of people's actual economic and political rights.

Methods

- A longitudinal study that utilizes three databases – Google Books Ngram Viewer, Sociological Abstracts, and the Web of Science – to examine the trending popularity of Marxism and postmodernism within the intellectual community from 1956 to 2015.
- Employs the same databases also to reveal the changed concerns on economic issues and cultural and political matters.
- Uses literature review to exhibit the alteration of people's actual political rights (e.g., women's and ethnic minorities' representation in various institutions) and their actual economic rights (e.g., real wages, union rates, and governments' spending on social programs).

Discussion

- The discussion part of my honours thesis looks at four schools of thought – disenchanted postmodernism, postmodern socialism, critical modernism, and Marxist socialism – and how they interpret the emancipatory potential of postmodernism.
- In what ways have these schools of thought accurately diagnosed the practical implication of postmodernism in terms of its emancipatory potential, and in what ways have they misjudged?
- Developing from the previous thought, my thesis aims to provide a contemporary re-examination of the postmodern agenda of emancipation, and argues that postmodernism can be liberating on one aspect while restraining on the other.
- Lessons to learn from the deficient emancipatory project of postmodernism.

Acknowledgements

- This study was supported by a Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Award.
- David Chen's Honours supervisor is Dr. William Carroll, Department of Sociology.