

The Hong Kong Diaspora - Acculturation and Identity

Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme

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1. Introduction

- **Acculturation** is an integral part of the migrant experience which occurs through direct and ongoing interaction between two cultural groups.
- Variables including migration motivation and support within the society of settlement influence the acculturation strategy adopted by migrants.
- The **Hong Kong diaspora** mainly comprises migrants from **two exoduses**, with their differences presented in the following table, and those residing in the **UK** will be the focus of this project.

	PRE-1997	POST-2020
Migration context	Uncertainties in Hong Kong's future prior to handover	Post-social movement instability and implementation of National Security Law
Migration period	1984 - 1997	2020 - ongoing
Visa restrictions	Highly selective	Minimal barriers
Politicized Collective Identity	No	Likely
Intention to return to HK	Yes	>60% No
Existence of HK communities in the UK	Chinatowns only	Various support groups and organisations

2. Theory

- Berry's (1992) model of acculturation is used as the theoretical background for this project.
- There are four acculturation strategies in relation to two dimensions, as presented in the following table:

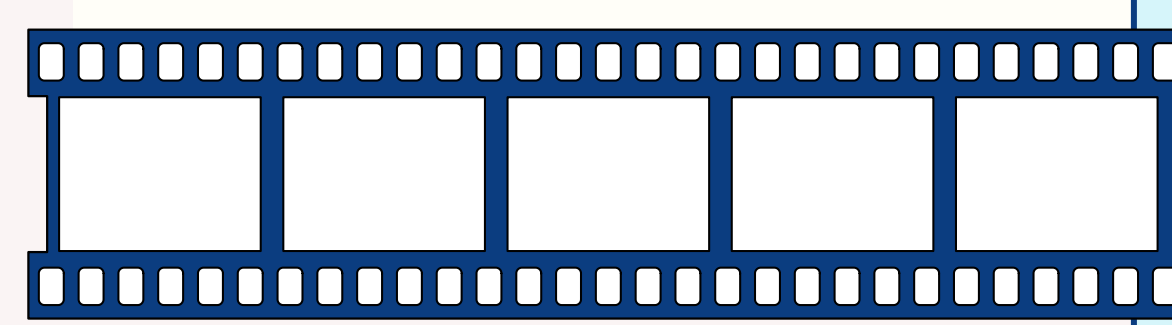
		Preservation of home culture	
		YES	NO
Acceptance of local culture	YES	Integration	Assimilation
	NO	Separation	Marginalization

Model of Acculturation (Berry, 1992), modified by Shirin

- The pre-1997 and post-2020 migrants are hypothesized to adopt the **integration** and **separation** strategies respectively.
- Unlike other migrant groups that experience politicization within the host country due to discrimination and unequal rights, post-2020 migrants are likely to possess a *Politicized Collective Identity* prior to their arrival resulting from their awareness of shared grievances during the social movement and its aftermath since 2019 (Simon & Grabow, 2010; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).
- Post-2020 migrants are prone to more **negative outcomes** compared to pre-1997 migrants in acculturation due to the following factors:
 - ✦ The politicization of their identity
 - ✦ The lack of English proficiency
 - ✦ Overall unpreparedness for the abrupt and unexpected migration

3. Methodology

- Four **semi-constructed, video-recorded interviews** were conducted with two migrants from each group to produce a **20-minute documentary**.
- The qualitative data collected aims to search for specific personal encounters to form examples and *concretize abstract concepts of acculturation*.
- The documentary intends to reach a wider audience and spread powerful messages by evoking empathy with its realness.
- **Lost in translation**: some interviewees spoke Cantonese to facilitate accurate communication of ideas but certain implications of terms were lost in translation



Quality of sample

- ✓ Partial geographical representation
- ✗ Lack of generalizability in terms of age and occupation



4. Findings

The Hong Konger identity and its legacy

“I don't really have a **fixed definition or impression of the Hong Konger identity.**” The fluid concept of identity evolves through migration and acculturation experiences. “How can they survive here if they don't westernize?” One's identification with certain region can stem from their sense of belonging, connection with the culture, & more. “Parents should encourage exposure to different resources to allow their children to generate their own perception of the Hong Konger identity.”

- *Culture learning* is easily achieved in local school settings
- Family education is key to preventing extensive *culture shedding*

HK migrant communities in the UK

The emergence of these communities did not cause separation but instead provided the necessary support that allowed fellow HK migrants to assimilate after their basic needs were satisfied.

“Out of necessity”
“Progressive milestone”
“For mutual protection and interest”

Behind the apparent acts of integration



“...in terms of adapting to the UK society, I must pretend to be British, or a Londoner.”

All four interviewees demonstrated assimilation through behavioral shifts in the public domain. However, some were purely motivated by the sense of social responsibility to minimize disruptions to the local society, which created a mismatch between their behaviors and attitudes in their private lives.

Places & people

The region of settlement can influence one's adoption of acculturation strategies.

- The welcoming atmosphere in smaller towns may facilitate one's adaptation to the new culture as integration is a two-way process (Kierans, 2021).
- The established migrant communities in larger cities facilitate culture preservation.

“Unlike the larger cities, the smaller cities (towns) are actually more welcoming”

To achieve integration:

1. Preserve Cantonese
2. Improve English proficiency along with an awareness of its subtext.

Language & Culture

Scenario

“The food is 'Okay'”

🇬🇧 = it's terrible 🇭🇰 = it's pretty good

“English proficiency is not sufficient for living abroad, but there is a need for you to understand the culture.”

5. Conclusion

All interviewees employed the **integration** strategy, albeit with varying degrees of proximity to assimilation or separation due to different behavioral shifts caused by major factors including the age of relocation and politicization of identity. It will be invaluable to revisit the post-2020 migrants in decades' time to observe the evolution of their identity as part of the Hong Kong diaspora.