


# What is life away from home?

**A document by emigrants from Hong Kong who are  
making a life elsewhere**

Over the past three years, I have met with 39 family groups (including members of my own family) to ask about their experiences of emigration. Twenty of these families had settled in the UK, four had settled in Australia, two in Canada, one in Singapore and one in Portugal. Eleven remained in Hong Kong and were considering whether or not to leave.

The 28 families who had chosen to make a life in a new place shared much about their aspirations, worries and concerns as well as the knowledge and skills they had used to overcome their challenges.

The 11 families who remained in Hong Kong shared some of their concerns and worries about the social and political atmosphere there. They had their own reasons to stay, but the changes they were seeing made them feel like they had emigrated to an unfamiliar place in which they had to adjust to new ways of life. Some of their ways of reclaiming their lives and protecting what they valued are also included in this document. I believe their experiences will resonate with those facing similar challenges in their new homes.



The original intention for creating this document was just to have something to share among my friends. Hence, it covers only the areas of concern that my friends raised. When their stories had been put together, they agreed that they should be shared anonymously in the hope that they may be of benefit to others. Contributions are marked with the person's country of residence.

We welcome others in similar contexts to get in touch and add their knowledge and wisdom to this document.



## Things we know about life as a Hong Kong immigrant in a new country

- We know how sorry we feel about leaving without formal goodbyes.
- We know the sorrow of leaving our senior friends and relatives who choose not to leave.
- We know how much we long for our family and friends who it will be hard to meet up with any time soon.
- We know how much we miss the people, the landscape, the smells and the food of Hong Kong.
- We know about the anxiety of hearing the news from Hong Kong, and the news from our countries of residence about their immigration policies.
- We know how difficult it is to adapt to the weather and limited daylight in colder countries.
- We know the feeling of having limited engagement with our local communities in our new countries.
- We know the sadness of not having our particular experiences and feelings acknowledged because the people around us are unfamiliar with the situation in Hong Kong.
- We know the uncertainty and stress of gaining employment, engaging in daily communication, adjusting to a new culture and developing friendships in a new place.
- We know how difficult it is when we can't access support from people who are familiar with our culture and needs.
- We know what is like to be a new immigrant, a stranger to a country, figuring out how to maintain our identity as a Hong Konger while settling in a new place.
- We know ways to reclaim our lives.



## **Negative Identity development and the refusal to compromise**

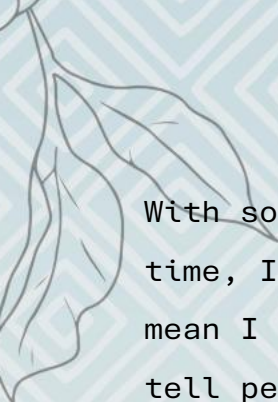
Leaving the place where we grew up and leaving our beloved family and friends has caused us so much sadness and guilt. Combined with the adjustment to a new culture, new lifestyle, new community, different ways of communication and different weather, this brought frustration and made us feel defeated, insufficient and overwhelmed. These negative feelings or suffering might visit anyone who has settled in a different part of the world. Still, there are Hong Kongers who refuse to compromise with the problems and respond actively to their adversities. Lots of different problems have visited us. Sometimes it is hard to name them all. The following are just some of problems we shared when we met. We hope that the following stories of resilience and responding to suffering will remind you of some of the things you do to get through the hard times. Or perhaps it will give you some new ideas to try out when these unwanted visitors appear.

## **WHEN WE ARE UNABLE TO SAY GOODBYE**

### ***Prioritise family safety* 以家庭安全優先**

We left during the pandemic. We had to avoid infection through any casual contact or farewell gatherings with family, friends and acquaintances. We need to have a health check 24 hours before boarding the plane. It was important to keep my family healthy and protect them from infection at such a critical time. Once infected, you can't fly. You know, news about the pandemic was so horrible at that time. (UK)





With so much anxiety and worry about the political situation at the time, I choose not to tell my friends I was leaving, which doesn't mean I don't love them. I wanted to protect my family. I choose to tell people after we had settled. I hope they understood why.

(Canada)

### ***A goodbye to former lifestyle* 告別舊有儲物生活模式**

Emigration is such a complicated issue. We must sort out what is most important to us. We can't bring everything with us. I had to dispose of so many beloved items and collections. I couldn't even have a close look and say goodbye to these beloved items. We needed to move on, so we choose to go simple. I treated it as a formal goodbye to my former "hoarding" lifestyle. (UK)

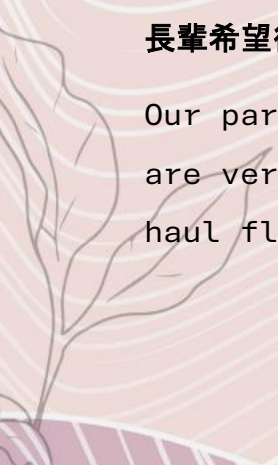
### ***Choosing what is most important for my future life* 選擇對未來重要的**

I refused farewell presents from my friends. I appreciated their good intentions, and I know they love me. It's just that I couldn't bring very many things with me when I choose to emigrate. I had to choose what would be most necessary to me for my future life. I hope they understood. I have had to learn to let go of things that are unimportant and chose what is most important for my future. (UK)

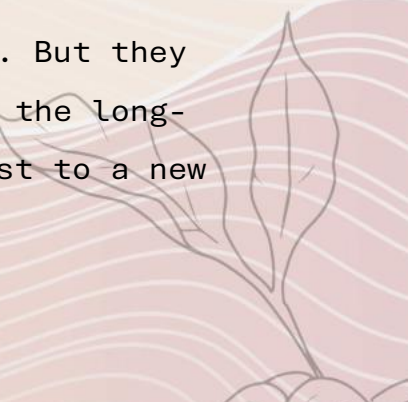
## **LEAVING OUR SENIOR PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS**

### ***Our parents hope their children will have a better future***


#### **長輩希望後生的有前途**



Our parents certainly feel sad to see us go without them. But they are very supportive. They know that they couldn't endure the long-haul flights, and it would be difficult for them to adjust to a new







culture. They encouraged us to go so we might have a better future and access better education for our children. (UK)

***My parents put safety first* 一切考慮安全至上**

We try to go back and see them when it's possible. My parents remind me to come back only if I find it is safe to do so. They put our safety as a priority. (UK)

***A big hug showing our love* 愛的擁抱**

My mom gave me a big hug at the airport. We both cried but we knew the tears represented love and support. (UK, Canada)


***We connect with our parents online* 與長輩更多網上聯系**

Even if we can't always go back to see them, we arrange daily video calls so our parents can talk with their grandchildren. (UK, Canada)

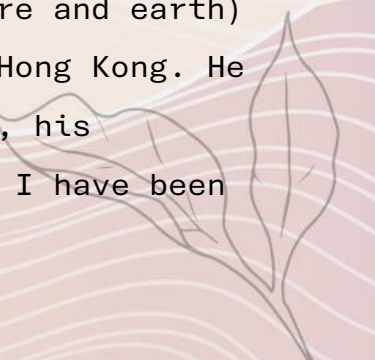
I find that I talk more with my parents now than when I was in Hong Kong. We have an online chat daily and my children are happy to chat with their grandparents too. (Canada, Australia)

Thanks to the development of online communication tools, even my parents can talk with me over WhatsApp or Signal. Nothing can keep us from connecting with each other. (Singapore, Portugal)


***I have developed a new understanding of my father* 對父親加深了認識**



My father is a renovation master in Hong Kong. We never talked about what he called the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) because he thinks that his is not a respected career in Hong Kong. He wanted me to work hard and get a job with prospects. Now, his expertise has become a topic of conversation between us. I have been







consulting him about how to fix things here. It is through this emigration that I realised that my father has a lot of useful skills. (UK)

***I talk to my mom about cooking* 建立煮饀的話題**

I never cooked when I was in Hong Kong. Now, my mom is teaching me how to make soups and other dishes that I love so much. We talk more than before. (UK, Canada, Australia)

**LONGING TO SEE FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

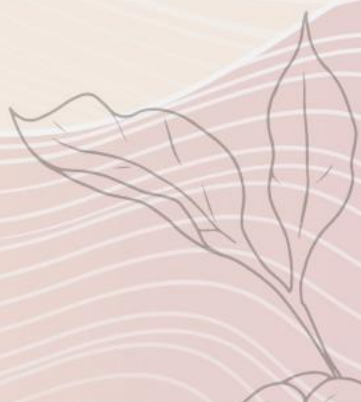

***Meeting friends who live nearby and sharing memories of Hong Kong life* 與其他移英的朋友敘舊細談香港往事**

I am lucky to have a few close friends moving to Vancouver. We used to meet regularly and share our past stories. Talking about things in Hong Kong has made me feel more connected to people and things in Hong Kong. (Canada)

***Arranging a trip to meet friends living in the UK* 安排到英國與朋友敘舊**

I have so many friends who moved to the UK, so I arranged a trip to visit friends there. (Australia, Portugal, Singapore)

I will arrange to meet friends who have moved to a different part of the UK. We meet somewhere in the middle or visit each other in our different living places. (UK)





### ***Planning a trip to meet friends***

**在亞洲找中間點於香港朋友敘舊 安排多站之旅探望不同地方的朋友**

Some of my friends decided not to leave Hong Kong. And I decided that I wouldn't be going back to Hong Kong any time soon. We have planned to meet somewhere else like Taiwan, Japan or Thailand. We all need a space to breathe and talk freely. (UK)

Now my friends are separated everywhere. I have been flying to Taiwan, Hong Kong, USA, Canada, France and now the UK to meet my friends. Although I can talk with them online and hear about their recent situations, I still prefer to arrange some trips to see them in person. (Singapore)

### **MISSING THE PEOPLE, LANDSCAPE, FOOD AND SMELLS OF HONG KONG**

***I travelled around Hong Kong and took many pictures before leaving***  
**出走前走訪香港地區拍照留念**

Before I left, I travelled around Hong Kong and took as many photos as I could. I thought that everything could change very quickly, especially places with colonial representation. I wanted to keep a record so at least I could show my children. (Australia)

***Carrying things that remind me of my days in Hong Kong***

**帶一些與香港有關的物品**

I carried with me some items that remind me of my days in Hong Kong. I have badges, postcards, books, newspapers and many items that remind me of where I came from, who I am and why I left Hong Kong. (UK)



***Listen to Cantonese pop songs* 聽下廣東歌**

I am a hi-fi lover and used to be an expert in helping people set up their sound and speaker systems in Hong Kong. Pop music is not my favourite music, but sometimes it is a good idea to listen to Cantonese pop songs when I miss Hong Kong. (UK)

***Go to yum cha in local Chinese restaurant* 飲茶**

Sometimes, we miss the dim sum so much and we will go to a restaurant here. It is comparatively easier to find authentic Hong Kong restaurants here in Canada. They are quite expensive, but at least it brings us the memory of tasty Hong Kong foods. (Canada)

***Maintain some of rituals we had in Hong Kong***

**保存香港習慣與父母飲茶 / 茶餐廳**

Adjusting to a new environment is harder for seniors and young people. I think it is beneficial to arrange a ritual that can give them some comfort. My parents like yum cha (going to traditional restaurants in Hong Kong) and Hong Kong-style milk tea. So once or twice a month, we go to yum cha or a Hong Kong-style fast-food restaurant together. (UK, Canada)

***Learn to cook Chinese food from YouTube* 網上跟梁芷靈學煮餸**

I started learning to cook Hong Kong dishes from YouTube. I especially like Leung Chi Ling (BackpaCooking) who shares how to find and use ingredients available in the UK to cook Hong Kong dishes. (UK, Australia, Portugal)



***Learn to make authentic Hong Kong milk tea* 學煮正宗港式奶茶**

My relative runs a fast-food restaurant in Hong Kong. So, I learnt from them how to make authentic milk tea. I make Hong Kong milk tea here and share tips about how to make good authentic milk tea. I love the smell of Hong Kong milk tea. It reminds me of the feeling of Hong Kong. (UK)

***We cook familiar Hong Kong dishes to make us feel at home***

**就算用好唔齊全嘅材料，也嘗試去煮俾到我喺屋企感覺嘅港式餸菜**

It is hard to find authentic ingredients to make Hong Kong dishes. But we try our best to cook Hong Kong soups and other dishes with similar ingredients, even if it's not exactly the same. These foods give us the feeling of being at home when we miss Hong Kong. (Portugal, Australia)

It is not easy to find authentic Hong Kong dishes in the UK unless you live in a big city. I have started to learn how to cook since being here, especially the Hong Kong dishes. I found that I was not used to baking food every day. I feel more comfortable eating Hong Kong dishes. To me, Hong Kong dishes are comfort food that suits my body and makes me feel at home. (UK)

***Sharing of our memories of Hong Kong* 分享大家以前在香港嘅大小事情和記憶**

When we meet a new Hong Konger friend here, we share stories of the things we remember about Hong Kong. I met someone who had also grown up in Tai Po and we shared a lot of memories about things there. These conversations give me a feeling of being home. (UK)



## ADAPTING TO EVERYDAY CHALLENGES IN A NEW COUNTRY

### ***Treat everyday challenges as a game*** 將難題當作挑戰性遊戲

I settled in a village where I needed to drive to the grocery store, to drive my children to school, and to drive to my workplace. I felt very nervous every morning when I had to drive. I think the “nervous” didn’t help me to improve my driving skills, so I tried to invite a new thought to my mind. This was: why not treat driving as a game. I could set myself a list of challenges to complete, such as reverse parking and handling roundabouts. I found this very interesting. I researched about driving skills on YouTube, asked friends for tips, and practiced on weekends. Now I treat everyday difficulties as if they were a challenging game and this makes life more interesting.  
(UK)

### ***I treat my new life like it’s a training course and I am learning a lot*** 視日常種種為參與一個多元自學課程


Living in this country is a big challenge. There are so many new things I hadn’t come across in Hong Kong. I have to live with spiders, which I am scared of. I have to deal with different machines I’d never used before, like the lawn mower and the hedge trimmer. When I look back at all the difficulties I’ve encountered in the past two years, it seems like I have been on a comprehensive self-directed course of study. I’ve learnt a lot of new things! (UK)

### ***Challenges can be a valuable topic of sharing among friends***

有時候，這些挑戰會成為朋友之間有營養的話題

I think we all have strengths and weaknesses. When I shared with my friend about some daily problems, I found that we shared some similar





difficulties and this has become a valuable topic for us to share, to learn together and to develop together. Every time we get some problem solved, it feels like we have passed an examination and we feel a shared happiness. (Australia)


***Let people help* 唔好介意搵人當手**

In Hong Kong, I used to have a servant at home to help prepare the meals and care for my children. Now, I need to take up this role myself while I am busy adjusting to everything here in this country. I used to feel very competent and never needed to ask for help. I had never imagined that these seemingly simple tasks could make me feel so overwhelmed. I cry at night. I talked to my friend living in a nearby village and she told me that I could try letting people help me. She had experienced a similar problem before. Her neighbour gave her a hand and she developed mutual support in her village. Now, I have joined this support network and I feel much relieved because I can get support when I have to handle multiple tasks and I can offer help in return. (UK)

***Make the most of the long days in summer***

**盡可能在有陽光時曬曬太陽，給自己正能量**

It is really depressing here in the months with very few hours of sunlight. I make the most of the long hours of sunlight in summer to travel with my family to different places here. We can absorb more sunlight and get familiar with this country. I think it makes all my family happier when we do this. (UK)





***Listen my favourite songs, hug the cat and put down the troubles***

**聽下音樂，抱下貓貓，俾自己放低煩惱**

The world is getting crazy, and it is very frustrating to hear sad news almost every day. When I hear any news that is ridiculous, I stop listening, breathe and then listen to my favourite songs to calm myself down. (Australia)

I share a lot with my friend in Hong Kong about our daily lives. I have found that we share some common distress. I feel so sad when I hear about things happening in Hong Kong where my family and friends are still living. When my emotion is getting so bad, I will detach myself from this emotion and try to pet and hug my cat. She can calm me down. (UK)

I feel very suppressed because it is harder to share with people things I found ridiculous or injustice happening every day here. What I can do is to forget. When I go home, I play my favourite song, hug my cats and put down all trouble. It helps detach me from my negative emotions. (Hong Kong)

***Develop links with local people*** 與當地人建立聯繫及互助

I moved to Portugal and none of my family speak Portuguese. One day, my husband had a traffic accident, and I felt so overwhelmed. I felt so anxious in the hospital because I couldn't communicate with the doctor who could only explain the situation with very limited English. Luckily, I remembered there was a nice Portuguese lady in my church who could speak English well and she helped me to communicate with the doctor. (Portugal)



### ***Maintain connections with people who can offer support***

#### **與你信任的人保持聯繫**

I don't have someone who I can speak freely with about everything. It is important for me to have real friends, but most of my friends are now based in different parts of the world. One of my closest friends moved with her family to the UK, but she keeps checking in on me. She listens to my problems without judging, and that helps when I am depressed. It is important to maintain a connection with someone who can offer you support, however far away they are. (Canada)

### ***Find genuine friendships 找一些你認為真誠的朋友做分享***

I live in a community with many Hong Kongers. This is a double-edged sword. The local community is resourceful, and people share a lot of useful information. But it is also full of gossip and dynamics between families. When I need to share my difficulties with someone, I still choose my close friends in Hong Kong who are genuine. (UK)

## **FEELING LIKE AN OUTSIDER**

### ***Connect with local people and treat this place as home***

#### **嘗試將這裏當作自己的家，走出屋外，與身邊人聯結**

Try connecting with local people. Start thinking this place as our home (家). We have to develop connections here. Whether we are living in a house (屋) or a flat (居住單位), our place is not limited to the area inside these walls. When I started venturing out of my house and connecting with my neighbours, I started feeling more connected to this place. (UK, Australia)



### ***Join free community courses***

#### **由參與社區的免費課程開始**

There are many free courses for beginners like me. I joined a free English course and a personal growth and wellbeing course organised by local community groups here. I think the local community is trying to help people to adjust better and settle down easier. I will take the computer essentials class here later. It is important to be willing to take the first step. (UK)

### ***Try developing new daily routines*** 在這裡建立生活日常

I have tried to develop some routines to make life feel easier here. I wake up very early, and I have plenty of time to do stretching and muscle training. I think a healthy body is crucial, it can help me get through many difficulties. (Australia, Canada)

I joined a gym and a yoga class here and tried developing interests I never had in Hong Kong. It energised me and made me feel connected to this community (UK, Portugal)

### ***Maintain a ritual or habit that makes you feel peaceful in an unfamiliar place*** 保持一些能讓你平靜下來的活動或習慣

I try to identify some rituals or habits that I used to do in Hong Kong. This could be as simple as drinking a good coffee in the morning before doing anything else. This makes me feel at home. I think people coming to an unfamiliar country can try finding something they are familiar with, which you can do here. For me, this can help me to feel peaceful in an unfamiliar place. (UK, Canada)



***Develop an interest in this country* 建立對這個地方的好奇**

I have been taking my study for the “Life in the UK” test very seriously. I am not just studying to pass the test, I really feel interested in it. I go to different museums, try the famous local foods and visit the national parks named in the curriculum. I search for information in the library. There is a lot of fun. (UK)

***Develop new interests and ways of life* 建立新的興趣 / 生活模式**

Canada is different from Hong Kong. Everything is expensive, so we minimise consumption like shopping, watching films or meeting friends like I would do a lot in Hong Kong. Doing less shopping or consuming doesn't mean life is worse. I used to be a shopaholic in Hong Kong and used branded items to affirm my identity. Here, I feel I have all I need. I feel very happy to make coffee and cake at home or dress simply when going out. It is what most local people do. I feel happier with this new lifestyle. (Canada)

***Participate in local sporting activities* 嘗試參與社區活動 參加馬拉松**

I joined the walking football sessions arranged in my community and met a lot of new friends. That has been good in developing connections here. (UK)

I love jogging and participated in a half marathon here. It was a very good experience and let me run around many streets I had never visit before. (UK)



### **Volunteer 參與義工服務**

There are so many charity shops requiring volunteers that welcome all to join. I have joined the volunteer group arranging support for the Ukrainian community weekly and feel happy to offer support to another community that is also in a difficult situation. (UK)

### **Behave well and let other know the quality of Hong Kongers**

#### **做好自己，讓當地人認識香港人的良好素質**

I try my best to let people know we are contributing rather than taking welfare from this country. We are not entitled to any welfare before we become naturalised. Still, it is important to behave well and give local people a good impression of us as being worthy of their respect. (UK)

### **Share Hong Kong dishes with neighbours 與鄰居分享港式餸菜**

I shared some Hong Kong dishes with my neighbours, and they asked me to teach them how to cook them. I think food can breakdown the walls between people of all ages. (UK)

## **RESPONDING TO SELF-DOUBT**

### **Find something to do at home**

#### **開始搵啲嘢做，我開始每朝早做下運動，至少保持健康**

My friends and parents in Hong Kong always ask about whether I have found employment here. Their concerns put a lot of pressure on me and leave me with a sense of failure. Sometimes, I wonder if I am not trying hard enough, if I'm lazy or insufficient. Instead, I look for things I can do at home. I exercise every morning to keep myself



strong. I find it good for my body and my sense of failure is getting less. (UK)

***I trust myself so others can trust me***

**自己要相信自己，先能讓人去信任你**

Seeing friends living in different regions secure a job very quickly made me start to doubt myself. After talking to more people, I found that others had faced difficulties too. I try reminding myself not to compare myself with others whose situations are different. I must trust myself before others can trust me. (UK)

***“Self-doubt” motivated me to learn***


**諗返轉頭，呢啲自我懷疑，反而幫我學咗好多嘢**

When I am job hunting I find many interesting jobs that we don't have in Hong Kong. However, the ones I am interested in often require special qualifications. For some time, I had serious self-doubts about my abilities. I felt I was so useless here and unqualified for almost everything I was interested in. Because of this self-doubt, I start thinking about studying something here. My friend advised me to take some community courses. This allowed me to learn something I didn't have time to learn before and I think my self-doubt motivated me to learn a lot. (UK)

***Take small, slow steps* 俾自己一步步慢慢嚟**

I know it will take time to get a job that I am interested in. But the concern from my parents adds to my worries and self-blame every time we have a chat over phone. Maybe it is because I am a man, and our culture accords respect to men who have a work identity over those who are unemployed. I am lucky that my wife shows her





understanding and asks me to allow myself to take small, slow steps.  
(Australia)

***Don't compare yourself with others*** 了解自己適合什麼，不要與人比較

I have a friend here who found a job working with animals and another who found gardening work. They both feel very happy because they found what they are interested in. But I also have a friend who works in garment-related work and who feels so unhappy. I think it is better not to compare myself with others. I try to think carefully what career I am interested in and follow my own pace. (UK)


## **MAINTAINING A CONNECTION WITH HONG KONG**

***Update Facebook more often*** 比以往更常更新 Facebook 信息

Sometimes when I want to share things with my family and friends in Hong Kong, it is already midnight. To let keep them up to date about my situation, I update and check my Facebook more often than before. My family and friends also update it more often to let me know how they are. It makes us feel connected. (UK)

***Pay more attention to each other's news*** 更關心對方身處的狀況及時事

When we have online calls with our family and friends in Hong Kong and other countries, we share our concern about their situations there. It seems like we know even more about the news of other countries than about the news of our own country. We feel so connected to each other and care a lot about the situation and wellbeing of our family and friends in faraway countries. (UK, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong)





***Hong Kongers in my region share Hong Kong dishes with each other***

**互相分享港式餸菜**

I lived in a place where many people from Hong Kong had settled. We loved to share different Hong Kong dishes we cooked at home during the festival. I feel so grateful that we have people contributing their knowledge of cooking and trying their best to share and preserve the Hong Kong food culture here. Some even teach children how to make Hong Kong dishes to help preserve this unique food culture. (UK)

***I always bring Hong Kong milk tea kits with me when I visit my friends in the UK*** 我會經常攜帶煮奶茶的工具探訪朋友，延續香港奶茶味道

I learnt how to make Hong Kong milk tea and bought a full set of tea-making things from Hong Kong. I always bring it with me when I visit the UK so I can make authentic milk tea in my friend's home. The taste makes us feel so connected to each other and let us remember the unique taste of Hong Kong. (Hong Kong)