



國立臺灣大學公共衛生學院公共衛生碩士學位學程

碩士論文

Master of Public Health Degree Program

College of Public Health

National Taiwan University

Master's Thesis

2019 年後在台香港移民心理健康社會政治決定因素

之詮釋現象學研究

Socio-Political Determinants of Mental Health Among

Post-2019 Hong Kong Immigrants in Taiwan:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Study

鄧雅文

Nga Man Kristie Tang

指導教授： 李柏翰 博士

Advisor: Po-Han Lee, Ph.D.

中華民國 115 年 8 月

August, 2026



國立臺灣大學碩(博)士學位論文
口試委員會審定書

MASTER'S THESIS(DOCTORAL DISSERTATION) ACCEPTANCE
CERTIFICATE
NATIONAL TAIWAN UNIVERSITY

2019 年後在台香港移民心理健康社會政治決定因素
之詮釋現象學研究

**Socio-Political Determinants of Mental Health Among
Post-2019 Hong Kong Immigrants in Taiwan: An
Interpretative Phenomenological Study**

本論文係 鄧雅文(姓名) R13847010 (學號) 在國立臺灣大學公共衛生碩士學位學程完成之碩(博)士學位論文, 於民國 115 年 7 月 13 日承下列考試委員審查通過及口試及格, 特此證明。

口試委員 Oral examination committee:

(指導教授 Advisor)

李柏翰

葉明叡

彭仁郁



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The decision to pursue a Master of Public Health was not one I had anticipated. Before Hong Kong's social movement in 2019 and the immigration journey that followed, graduate study had never featured in my plans. It was the pragmatic need to accelerate my permanent residency application in Taiwan that first led me to this programme. Yet what unfolded over the course of my studies far exceeded what I could have imagined at the outset.

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to Professor Freedom Leung and Professor Helen Chan at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, who generously wrote letters of recommendation on my behalf and made this journey possible.

My deepest thanks go to my thesis advisor, Professor Po-Han Lee, whose guidance has been unwavering throughout this research. For those conducting qualitative work on trauma-related topics from the vantage point of an insider, the emotional weight can be considerable. Professor Lee consistently reminded me of the importance of maintaining reflective journals and attending to the emotions that surfaced in the process. His attentiveness to my well-being as a researcher was as meaningful as his scholarly guidance.

I am also grateful to my fellow MPH cohort and the classmates I came to know through the Qualitative Research course, whose companionship and encouragement sustained me through the more demanding stretches of this programme. I extend particular thanks to Professor Kuan for the constructive feedback that helped me refine and strengthen this work. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Population Health and Welfare Research Center for its funding support, which made this thesis research possible.

This thesis would not have been possible without the Hong Kong migrants in Taiwan who agreed to be interviewed. They shared their experiences with openness and trust, offering perspectives that have fundamentally shaped this research. The interviews also became, unexpectedly, a process of self-healing, and for that I am deeply grateful.



中文摘要

2019 年反送中運動後大量香港居民基於政治、經濟及教育等考慮移居臺灣。儘管臺灣為主要目的地之一，針對此群體的系統性心理健康研究仍付之闕如。本研究採創傷知情詮釋現象學分析法（IPA），深度訪談九名 2019 年後在台香港移民並以社會與政治健康決定因素框架進行分析。本研究以「不情願遷移」(reluctant migration) 作為敏感化概念，分析受限選擇與預期政治及生活方式流失如何形塑不同的遷移路徑。分析辨識出三項主要主題：其一，政治流離於移居後持續存在，移民前的政治處境透過創傷潛伏、再激活及持續的政治警覺等持續影響受訪者移居後的心理狀態與社會生活。其二，制度不穩定性與保護性基礎設施共同形塑脆弱性。例如簽證身分、居留不確定性及專業資格認可等均造成長期壓力，而可近用的醫療與社會支持則發揮保護作用。其三，文化適應不完整，語言相近性不一定可以保證歸屬感，而偏離在地社會規範的行為也可能會帶來負面後果。兩項發現尤其值得重視。其一，法律身分的取得與文化歸屬感可在分析上區分，正式身分的進展未必帶來等比例的歸屬感。其二，正式制度支持大多未能觸及最需要協助者，此缺口轉由非正式社群與同儕網絡填補。上述發現為發展文化適切之心理健康服務，並為面臨政治流離與遷移壓力人口之移民政策改革，提供基礎實證依據。

關鍵詞：香港移民、臺灣、心理健康、不情願遷移、社會健康決定因素、政治健康決定因素



Abstract

Following Hong Kong's 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Movement, substantial numbers of Hong Kong residents migrated to Taiwan for political, economic, and educational reasons. Despite Taiwan being a preferred destination, systematic mental health research on this population remains absent. This study explored the mental health experiences of post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan using trauma-informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), drawing on in-depth interviews with nine participants. The analysis was guided by an integrated social and political determinants of health framework and used reluctant migration as a sensitising concept to examine how constrained choice and anticipated political loss shaped heterogeneous migration pathways. Three superordinate themes were identified. First, political displacement continued after migration: pre-migration political conditions persisted in participants' psychological and social lives through trauma dormancy, reactivation, and sustained political vigilance. Second, institutional precarity and protective infrastructure jointly shaped vulnerability, as visa status, residency uncertainty, and credential recognition produced chronic stress, while accessible healthcare and social support acted as protective factors. Third, cultural adaptation remained incomplete, as linguistic proximity did not guarantee belonging and departures from local social norms carried real costs. Two findings warranted particular emphasis. Legal incorporation and cultural belonging proved analytically separable, since gains in formal status did not



translate into proportional gains in felt belonging. Formal institutional support largely failed to reach those who needed it most, with informal community and peer networks filling the gap instead. These findings provided foundational evidence for developing culturally competent mental health services and for reforming immigration policy to support populations navigating political displacement and migration stress.

Keywords: Hong Kong immigrants, Taiwan, mental health, reluctant migration, social determinants of health, political determinants of health



Table of Contents

MASTER'S THESIS(DOCTORAL DISSERTATION) ACCEPTANCE	
CERTIFICATE	i
中文摘要	iii
Abstract	iv
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
I. Introduction and Background.....	1
II. Literature Review and Contextual Framework	4
1. Historical Context and Mental Health Baseline	4
2. Mental Health Impacts Among Post-2019 Hong Kong Emigrants	5
2.1 International Evidence Base	5
2.2 Social Determinants Framework Application	6
2.3 Political Determinants of Health Framework.....	8
2.4 Critical Research Gap and Implications.....	17
2.5 Socio-Political Determinants of Mental Health: WHO Framework Applied to Post-2019 Hong Kong Immigrants in Taiwan.....	18
3. Research Questions and Objectives	21
III. Methodology.....	23
1. Research Design	23
2. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity	24
3. Participant Recruitment and Selection.....	27
3.1 Recruitment Process.....	27
3.2 Purposive Sampling and Sample Composition	30



3.3 Inclusion of Participant Z: Rationale.....	31
4. Data Collection	32
5. Transcription, Field Notes, and Translation	35
5.1 Methodological Note on AI-Assisted Tools	36
6. Data Analysis: Applied IPA Procedure	37
6.1 Analytical Approach: Idiographic to Comparative Analysis	38
6.2 Applied Six-Stage IPA Process	38
6.3 Trauma-Informed Analytical Approaches	41
6.4 Thematic Organisation: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes	42
6.5 Cross-Case Comparative Analysis and Mechanism-Based Analytical Positioning	44
6.6 Theoretical Integration: Social and Political Determinants of Health	47
7. Quality Assurance and Rigour.....	48
7.1 Member Checking.....	48
7.2 Supervisory Debriefing.....	49
7.3 Reflexive Practice.....	49
8. Data Management and Confidentiality.....	50
9. Ethical Considerations.....	51
IV. Findings	53
Analytical Positioning of Participants.....	56
Superordinate Theme 1: Political Displacement Continues After Migration	61
1a. <i>Threshold, Accumulation, Mixed-Motive, and Planned Pathways into Migration</i>	61



1b. Trauma Dormancy, Reactivation, Political Vigilance, and Moral Powerlessness.....	66
Superordinate Theme 2: Institutional Precarity and Protective Infrastructure Shape Vulnerability	70
2a. Visa Status, Residency Uncertainty, Credential Recognition, Employer Dependency, and Occupational Reset	71
2b. Healthcare Access, Social Support, and Help-Seeking as Protective Infrastructure.....	78
Superordinate Theme 3: Cultural Adaptation and Incomplete Belonging..	90
3a. Language, Emotional Expression, Cantonese Recognition, and Belonging	90
3b. Hierarchy Culture, Gendered Vulnerability, and the Cost of Correction	95
3c. Identity and Settlement Orientation	101
Summary of Key Analytical Findings	106
V. Discussion	107
1. Overview of Argument and Theoretical Frameworks	107
2. Political Displacement Before and After Migration	110
3. Migration Pathway as Upstream Structural Determinant.....	112
4. Constitutional Ambiguity and Political Determinants	115
5. Cultural Proximity, Hierarchy, and Professional Recognition	117
6. Language, Cantonese, and the Three-Layer Service Gap.....	123
7. Taiwan's Healthcare System as a Protective Factor	126
8. Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Patterns	129
9. The Residency-Mental Health Access Intersection	133
VI. Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion	136



1. Recommendations	136
<i>1.1 Government and Immigration Authorities</i>	136
<i>1.2 Universities</i>	137
<i>1.3 Healthcare and Mental Health Providers</i>	138
<i>1.4 Employers and Professional Institutions</i>	139
<i>1.5 Community Organisations and Peer Networks</i>	140
2. Limitations	141
3. Future Research Directions	144
4. Conclusion	146
VII. References	148
VIII. Appendix	155
Appendix A: Interview Topics and Approach	155
Appendix A- Chinese: 訪談主題與方法	158
Appendix B: Condensed interview summaries	161
Case Summary: Participant A	161
Case Summary: Participant B	162
Case Summary: Participant C	163
Case Summary: Participant D	164
Case Summary: Participant E	165
Case Summary: Participant F	166
Case Summary: Participant G	167
Case Summary: Participant H	168
Case Summary: Participant Z	169



List of Tables

Table 1. Institutional context for post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants: Taiwan compared with the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.....	12
Table 2 Mapping of identified factors onto the WHO social and political determinants framework.....	20
Table 3 Participants' particulars.....	31
Table 4 Overview of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes.....	53
Table 5 Nine-Participant Internal Comparison.....	59
Table 6 Focused comparison of mental-health help-seeking pathways.....	130



List of Figures

Fig. 1 Hong Kong residents granted residency and permanent residency in Taiwan, 2016–2024.....	3
Fig. 2 Socio-political determinants of mental health among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan, adapting the WHO CSDH conceptual framework and the Political Determinants of Health perspective.....	19



I. Introduction and Background

Research among Hong Kong immigrants in the United Kingdom revealed alarming mental health statistics: 18.9% reported clinically significant depression, 25.8% experienced anxiety disorders, and 23.8% demonstrated PTSD symptoms related to recent political developments [1]. These rates substantially exceeded those documented during Hong Kong's 2019 social unrest itself [2], suggesting that immigration experiences may have exacerbated rather than alleviated pre-existing psychological trauma. While comprehensive mental health research existed for Hong Kong immigrants in Western contexts, Taiwan remained a complete research void despite being the preferred destination for many Hong Kongers [3]. No systematic investigation had examined the mental health experiences of Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan, creating a critical knowledge gap that prevented evidence-based policy development and service provision.

Taiwan occupied a unique position among Hong Kong immigration destinations. Unlike other major receiving countries that offered either cultural distance with clear legal pathways or established support systems, Taiwan presented a combination of cultural proximity and legal uncertainty [4]. Although Hong Kong immigrants encountered familiar cultural practices and some degree of linguistic accessibility in Taiwan, these advantages were complicated by structural barriers within the



immigration system. Outdated regulatory frameworks, unclear eligibility requirements, and shifting administrative standards left many immigrants navigating prolonged uncertainty with limited institutional guidance. This combination of cultural proximity and legal ambiguity produced a distinctive settlement context that has received limited attention in existing migration and mental health literature.

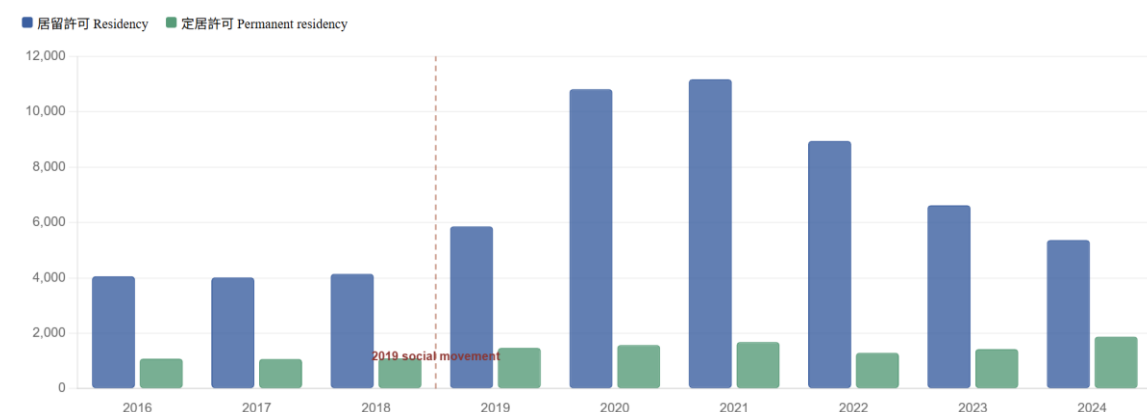
Reports indicated that Hong Kong immigrants arrived in Taiwan with expectations of smooth integration, only to encounter systemic barriers. Professional immigrants faced particular difficulties obtaining recognition of their qualifications and accessing employment in their fields due to certification requirements linked to immigration status [5]. These challenges compounded as the post-2019 immigrant population grew substantially. According to Taiwan's National Immigration Agency, the number of Hong Kong residents granted residency permits surged from 4,148 in 2018 to a peak of 11,173 in 2021 as shown in Fig. 1, representing a 169% increase within three years of the Anti-Extradition Law Movement [6, 7]. Although annual arrivals moderated after 2022, permanent residency approvals reached a record 1,880 in 2024, indicating that earlier cohorts were transitioning to long-term settlement [6]. Given documented mental health burdens among Hong Kong immigrants in other receiving countries and the psychological impact of the 2019 unrest itself, this growing population may include substantial unmet mental health needs that require culturally adapted service planning.



Yet culturally adapted mental health services and dedicated institutional responses for this group remained absent, underscoring an urgent need for systematic evidence to guide service planning and resource allocation.

This study addressed this critical knowledge gap through the first qualitative investigation of mental health determinants among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan to the best of my knowledge. The research aimed to provide foundational insights for Taiwan's health authorities and the National Health Insurance framework to develop culturally competent mental health services, inform immigration policy reforms, and establish evidence-based support for a vulnerable population navigating political displacement in Taiwan's distinctive context.

Fig. 1 Hong Kong residents granted residency and permanent residency in Taiwan, 2016–2024



Source: National Immigration Agency, Taiwan [6], Graph plotted by Kristie



II. Literature Review and Contextual Framework

1. Historical Context and Mental Health Baseline

Hong Kong's 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Movement represented an unprecedented escalation in both scale and psychological impact compared to previous political mobilizations. While earlier movements like the 2003 Article 23 protests and 2014 Umbrella Movement had established precedents for political resistance and documented mental health consequences, the 2019 protests evolved into sustained conflict involving escalating violence, police use of force, and widespread social disruption [1, 5].

The foundational Ni et al. study published in *The Lancet* documented profound mental health impacts during the 2019-20 social unrest [2]. This 10-year prospective cohort study revealed that probable depression affected 11.2% of participants during 2019, representing a dramatic increase from 1.9% during 2009-2014 and 6.5% in 2017. The prevalence of suspected PTSD reached 12.8%, with an additional 24.3% experiencing anxiety symptoms [2]. These rates were comparable to populations experiencing armed conflicts or terrorist attacks, indicating trauma exposure equivalent to wartime conditions.

Critically, fewer than half of affected individuals expressed willingness to seek professional help, creating substantial treatment gaps that would prove relevant for



understanding help-seeking behaviours among emigrants [2]. Heavy social media use was strongly associated with both depression and PTSD symptoms, while family support served as a protective factor against depression [2].

2. Mental Health Impacts Among Post-2019 Hong Kong Emigrants

2.1 International Evidence Base

The most comprehensive research on post-2019 Hong Kong immigrant mental health emerged from the United Kingdom, where the British National (Overseas) visa pathway attracted over 150,000 Hong Kong residents [1]. The 2022 survey by Hongkongers in Britain provided the first systematic assessment of mental health outcomes among this politically displaced population, revealing mental health burdens that exceeded even the elevated rates documented in Hong Kong during the 2019 unrest.

Among 658 respondents, 18.9% reported clinically significant depression symptoms, 25.8% experienced anxiety disorders, and 23.8% demonstrated PTSD symptoms specifically related to the 2019 protests and National Security Law implementation [1]. These rates represented substantial increases compared to Hong Kong baseline data, suggesting that migration itself, combined with ongoing political concerns, exacerbated pre-existing psychological distress.



The research identified distinct stressors specific to Hong Kong immigrants: perceived fear of retribution for discussing politics, persistent worry for people remaining in Hong Kong, and self-censorship behaviours that made therapy extremely difficult [1]. Despite 62% reporting improved overall mental health since moving to Britain, the majority remained unlikely to pursue mental health treatment, with 45% having never met with a general practitioner [1].

While Canada and Australia have established pathways for Hong Kong immigrants, systematic mental health research from these contexts remains limited. Survey research revealed that 10.6% of Hong Kong residents expressing emigration intentions identified Taiwan as their preferred destination [3], highlighting Taiwan's appeal despite lacking a formal immigration infrastructure.

2.2 Social Determinants Framework Application

Research on political migration demonstrates how structural factors and intermediary factors shape mental health outcomes across different displaced populations [8, 9]. For Hong Kong immigrants, these determinants operate distinctively based on destination country characteristics, and require grounding in the specific political nature of their departure.



Hoffmann[10], revisiting Hirschman's [11] exit-voice-loyalty framework, argued that in transnational political migration, departure does not represent the abandonment of political voice but its transformation: migrants can exit while continuing to exercise voice from abroad and maintaining loyalty to their country of origin. Applied to the Hong Kong context, this framework illuminates a critical pre-migration dimension of the post-2019 exodus. The National Security Law foreclosed the domestic exercise of political voice, yet loyalty to democratic aspirations persisted. The result was a form of unresolved political grief, a psychological burden that predated the act of departure and continued beyond it. Li and Liao [4] extended this understanding by characterising the exodus as future-driven rather than forced: most migrants departed in anticipation of the erosion of their way of life rather than under immediate threat of persecution. Unlike conventional refugees, these migrants retained the option of return, which complicated their psychological processing of loss and produced an ambiguous grief that standard trauma frameworks may not fully capture.

Structural determinants included immigration policy uncertainty, which created chronic psychological stress. In the UK, where the BNO visa provided clear legal status, Hong Kong immigrants still reported substantial mental health challenges, but these relate primarily to cultural adaptation rather than legal uncertainty [1]. Professional qualification recognition challenges represent another structural barrier, particularly



affecting healthcare professionals who cannot obtain direct qualification conversion and face threats to professional identity alongside economic insecurity [5].

Intermediary determinants include social network disruption and reconstruction challenges. Many Hong Kong immigrants report reluctance to engage with local Hong Kong community organisations due to political surveillance concerns or ideological divisions, creating paradoxical situations where cultural familiarity may increase rather than decrease social isolation [1]. Healthcare access depends heavily on cultural competency and understanding of political trauma contexts, with providers often lacking knowledge of Hong Kong's political situation [1].

Individual heterogeneity across gender, immigration pathways, employment status, and family composition creates distinct vulnerability profiles. Investment immigrants face different stressors than professionals encountering credential recognition challenges, while families with children navigate educational and cultural transmission pressures [5, 12, 13].

2.3 Political Determinants of Health Framework

2.3.1 The Three-Government Context

While social determinants frameworks capture how socioeconomic conditions shape health outcomes, they inadequately address the distinctive political forces affecting



Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan. Political Determinants of Health (PDOH) recognize that health outcomes are fundamentally shaped by political processes, power structures, and governance systems operating across national boundaries [8, 9, 14].

Hong Kong immigrants navigate an unprecedented three-government configuration: Beijing's political repression prevents return, Taiwan's geopolitical constraints limit formal protection, and cross-strait security discourse affects social acceptance. This creates what reports describe as a "triangular political trap" generating distinctive mental health stressors [5].

2.3.2 Political Trauma as Political Determinant

Beijing's National Security Law implementation represents transnational political control extending beyond Hong Kong's borders, creating persistent surveillance anxiety that systematically undermines mental health through chronic stress and self-censorship. Peng's research on Taiwan's White Terror survivors demonstrates how political trauma creates lasting institutional distrust and help-seeking avoidance [15]. While Hong Kong immigrants' experiences differ, these findings suggest how political surveillance trauma may paradoxically undermine trust in Taiwan's democratic institutions meant to provide refuge.



Taiwan's security discourse, while democratically necessary, inadvertently creates social stigma affecting immigrant integration. Political restrictions on civic participation directly contradict immigrants' original motivations for seeking democratic refuge, creating ongoing identity conflicts about democratic exclusion [16, 17].

2.3.3 Political Determinants as Risk Amplifiers

Political determinants systematically amplify traditional social determinant effects: economic insecurity intensifies with legal status uncertainty, social isolation deepens with security-related suspicion, and healthcare barriers multiply when political anxieties influence service-seeking. This integration of political and social determinants becomes particularly evident in Taiwan's unique position as a destination for Hong Kong immigrants, where cultural proximity intersects with complex political constraints.

2.3.4 Taiwan's Unique Destination Context

Taiwan occupies a distinctive position among Hong Kong immigration destinations, presenting cultural and linguistic familiarity alongside legal and institutional uncertainty. This combination creates conditions that may either facilitate or complicate



mental health outcomes in ways that remain undocumented, requiring analysis through integrated social and political determinant frameworks.

2.3.5 The Nature of Post-2019 Migration to Taiwan

Before examining Taiwan's institutional context, it is necessary to characterise the type of migration this population represents. Ho and Fung [18] argued that Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan are most accurately described as “reluctant migrants,” occupying a position between forced and voluntary migration, whose departure was driven primarily by the fear of losing their accustomed way of life rather than by economic incentives or immediate political persecution. Unlike forced migrants, reluctant migrants retain complicated emotional ties to their place of origin, making psychological settlement more difficult to achieve. Unlike voluntary economic migrants, they cannot easily reframe their move in terms of material gain, leaving unresolved a form of political and cultural loss that existing mental health frameworks have not systematically addressed.

This migration was further shaped by what Li and Liao [4] described, drawing on Anderson [19], as an “imagined community,” a pre-migration perception of Taiwan constructed through political solidarity, media portrayals, and social networks. Many participants characterised Taiwan as a “democratic paradise” before departure,

anticipating cultural familiarity, shared democratic values, and smooth integration. This imagined community provided motivational impetus for choosing Taiwan, but simultaneously established expectations whose frustration constituted a significant post-migration psychological stressor. Table 1 summarised how Taiwan compared with the three most common destinations for post-2019 Hong Kong emigrants across four institutional dimensions, drawing on policy and scholarly literature rather than the present study's participant data.

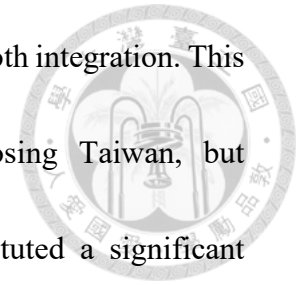


Table 1. Institutional context for post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants: Taiwan compared with the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia

Destination	Identity security	Work protection	Culturally-friendly services	Mental health access
Taiwan	Governed by the Hong Kong and Macao Relations Act, not general immigration or refugee law; no asylum framework. National territory is judicially undefined: Interpretation No. 328 held its scope a non-justiciable political question [20]. The Act classifies Hong Kong residents as a distinct category, neither ROC nationals nor foreign	Administered by the Mainland Affairs Council rather than the economic-mandate National Development Council; before the 2026 reform, Hong Kong and Macau graduates had a shorter post-study job-seeking window than other groups; employer-tied work residency creates entrapment; professional credential recognition contested (Control Yuan	Small, recently formed community; no centralised directory of Cantonese-capable services; Cantonese under-recognised in the public sphere; support concentrated in a few human-rights NGOs [25]	National Health Insurance provides affordable, protective general healthcare, but mental-health provision for this population shows a three-layer insufficiency (Cantonese-language gap, service-visibility/referral gap, political-trauma expertise gap); administrative opacity can deter help-seeking [15, 26, 27]

Destination	Identity security	Work protection	Culturally-friendly services	Mental health access
	nationals. Treatment is split: employment follows foreign-national rules, while residence follows a separate immigration regime with discretionary, national-interest denial. [17, 20-22]	nursing case)[5, 23, 24]		
United Kingdom	Dedicated BN(O) visa with a clear “5+1” route to settlement then citizenship, reaffirmed by government in 2025 [28]	Full, immediate work rights on the BN(O) visa, not tied to an employer [28]	Large, long-established Cantonese-speaking diaspora and a government-funded Hong Kong UK Welcome Programme; community emotional-support networks documented [28, 29]	NHS access after payment of the Immigration Health Surcharge; documented cohort mental-health need, including elevated distress and adjustment disorder [1, 28-30]
Canada	Dedicated permanent-residence pathways (Streams A and B, the “Lifeboat Scheme”) leading to PR and citizenship, but slow processing generates future uncertainty: prolonged PR processing was the second most-cited stressor (54.9%) and 42% remained	Open work permit available while PR is decided; yet despite high education and English proficiency, 80% reported difficulty finding work matching their skills, and employment was the leading stressor (56.3%) [31, 32]	Large, long-established Hong Kong diaspora; newcomers rely mainly on co-ethnic informal support (76.4% on friends and relatives) rather than formal services, with low organisational participation and one-third unsure what assistance exists [32]	Provincial health coverage on PR pathways, though 59.5% found accessing healthcare difficult; self-reported mental-health burden relatively low (a healthy-immigrant effect, 84.3% reporting no long-term condition), with distress concentrated around PR delay,

Destination	Identity security	Work protection	Culturally-friendly services	Mental health access
	unsure whether to settle permanently[31, 32]			employment, and finances; only 26.6% used government resources [32]
Australia	Dedicated Hong Kong PR streams (subclass 189 and 191) leading to PR then citizenship, with no separate skills assessment [4, 33]	Work rights derive from prior skilled or graduate visas (457/482/485), with up to five-year post-study work for Hong Kong and BN(O) graduates [33]	Large established Hong Kong diaspora; post-2019 settlement experience documented by Li and Liao, though Cantonese-specific service provision is not systematically mapped [4]	Medicare access via PR pathways; cohort-specific mental-health evidence base limited [4]

Note: The table draws on policy and scholarly literature rather than the present study's participant data. The United Kingdom and Canada are the best-documented comparators for Hong Kong migrant mental health; evidence for the Australian cohort remains comparatively limited.

2.3.6 Intersecting Institutional Challenges

Taiwan's approach demonstrates how political determinants systematically shape social determinant pathways affecting immigrant mental health. The informal asylum system operates through Article 18 of the Laws and Regulations Regarding Hong Kong and Macao Affairs rather than comprehensive refugee legislation, reflecting

geopolitical constraints that create chronic psychological stress [5, 21]. Recent developments illustrate these political-social interactions: substantially increased processing times with some applicants reporting no communication for over a year, unclear approval criteria, and denials based on broad “national interests” standards [5, 16, 17]. Taiwan’s Control Yuan investigation documented how these procedural uncertainties create chronic stress affecting economic security, social integration, and healthcare access [5].

The gap between pre-migration expectations and post-migration institutional reality proves particularly damaging to psychological wellbeing. Li and Liao [4, 18] found that Hong Kongers whose permanent residency applications were delayed or denied experienced not merely practical inconvenience but a profound sense of betrayal: the democratic promise of Taiwan had been extended but not honored. Ho and Fung [18] identified an additional cultural dimension to this disappointment, documenting systematic conflict between Hong Kong immigrants’ rule-of-law orientation and Taiwan’s relational, affect-based social norms. This cultural dissonance, which Ho and Fung termed a “cultural conflict,” was experienced not as surface-level difference but as an undermining of the very cultural identity migrants had sought to preserve. Ho and Fung [18] also observed that Taiwan’s ruling party had instrumentalized the Hong

Kong issue for electoral purposes, a dynamic that further eroded migrants' trust in institutional support and deepened political disillusionment.



The inadequacy of Taiwan's institutional response to politically-driven immigrant populations is not without precedent. Teng [34], in a study of Tibetan immigrants in Taiwan, documented how a comparable group, whose migration was similarly precipitated by political circumstances, experienced dual social exclusion from both their community of origin and Taiwanese society, suffered compound cultural loss, and received social work interventions constrained by political pressures to the point of professional ineffectiveness. The structural conditions Teng identified, including the absence of refugee legislation, the concentration of responsibility within a single politically compromised institution, and the systemic failure to address collective trauma, are directly applicable to the Hong Kong immigrant context and suggest that without structural policy reform, mental health consequences for Hong Kong immigrants may follow a comparable trajectory.

These legal uncertainties compound healthcare system limitations. While Taiwan's National Health Insurance theoretically provides universal mental health coverage for legal residents, capacity constraints particularly affect immigrant populations [16]. Peng Jen-Yu, a researcher specializing in political trauma therapy identified critical deficits in Taiwan's mental health infrastructure for addressing political violence

trauma, noting that most helping professionals lacked the specialised training necessary to understand and treat trauma resulting from state violence, which created substantial barriers for Hong Kong immigrants seeking culturally competent mental health support [26].

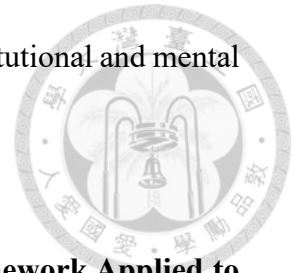
Community organisations including Taiwan Association for Human Rights and Economic Democracy Union provide housing and legal assistance, yet mental health service gaps remain pronounced, with limited specialised trauma programs and insufficient coordination between immigration support and mental health services [17]. This fragmentation means immigrants navigate multiple disconnected systems while managing legal uncertainties and cultural adaptation simultaneously.

2.4 Critical Research Gap and Implications

This gap is both empirical and theoretical. Existing migration mental health research has paid limited attention to how political displacement affects mental health in culturally proximate but legally ambiguous destinations. Taiwan therefore provides an important case for examining how linguistic familiarity, democratic identification, residency uncertainty, institutional opacity, and limited culturally appropriate support interact to shape mental health vulnerability, resilience, and help-seeking.

By integrating social and political determinants of health, this study offers a context-sensitive analysis of post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants' mental health experiences in

Taiwan and provides evidence for developing more appropriate institutional and mental health responses.



2.5 Socio-Political Determinants of Mental Health: WHO Framework Applied to Post-2019 Hong Kong Immigrants in Taiwan

Figure 2 adapted the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) conceptual framework and the Political Determinants of Health perspective to this study. An overarching structural and political context conditioned the intermediary determinants and individual-level factors that together shaped mental-health outcomes; each layer listed the factors identified in the Findings.

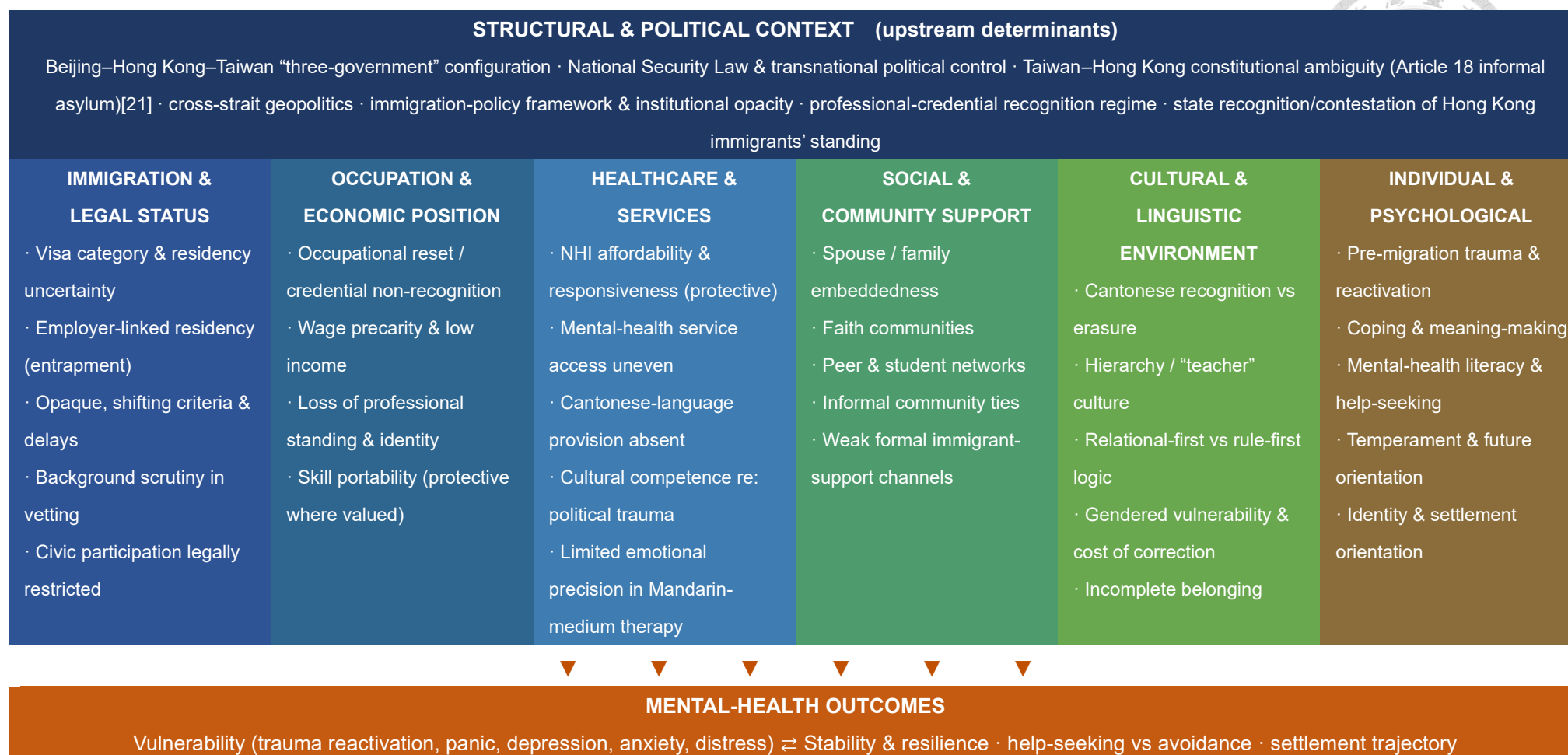


Figure 2. Socio-political determinants of mental health among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan, adapting the WHO CSDH conceptual framework [1, 2, 35] and the Political Determinants of Health perspective[3-5, 8, 36]. Layout after the Kaiser Family Foundation social-determinants schematic.



Table 2. Mapping of identified factors onto the WHO social and political determinants framework

LAYER	DETERMINANT DOMAIN	FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN THIS STUDY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANTS / MECHANISM
Structural determinants (socio-economic & political context)	Immigration & legal-status framework	Visa category and residency uncertainty; employer-linked residency; opaque and shifting administrative criteria; background scrutiny; legal limits on civic participation.	B (prolonged residency ordeal), H (employer-linked entrapment), D (background scrutiny; civic restriction), A (institutional opacity).
	Geopolitical relationship & constitutional ambiguity	Three-government configuration; Article 18 informal asylum without refugee law; cross-strait tension; institutional vagueness around Hong Kong immigrants' standing.	All participants; C (eschatological framing of cross-strait anxiety), D (wariness of policy shifts).
	Professional-credential recognition regime	Non-transfer of qualifications; seniority-gated recognition; protective where skills are locally rare and demonstrable.	B & E (credential non-recognition), A (recognised but no institutional authority), Z (skills locally valued — exception).
Political determinants (cross-cutting)	Transnational political control & political trauma	NSL surveillance and self-censorship carried across the border; political vigilance; moral powerlessness; upstream 2019 political trauma.	E & B (self-censorship), G & C (planned/mixed-motive political exit), D (embodied trauma), F (moral powerlessness).
	State recognition & official treatment	Official disrespect; instrumentalisation of the Hong Kong issue; perceived discrimination in vetting and funding.	B (dismissive immigration official; funding discrimination), D (professional history treated as risk).
Intermediary determinants	Material circumstances (employment, income, occupation)	Occupational reset; wage precarity; loss of professional standing; income insecurity.	A (wage precarity), B (rebuilding standing), E (vocational displacement), H (low income + multiple jobs).
	Healthcare system accessibility	NHI affordability, responsiveness and efficiency as a protective factor; residual social-legitimacy anxiety.	F & Z (protective care), D (positive access), H (positive but language-limited).
	Social support networks	Spouse/family embeddedness; faith communities; peer and student networks; informal community ties; weak formal channels.	F & Z (spousal/family anchoring), C & F (faith), D (student association), G (constructed network), B (informal ties).
	Mental-health service access & cultural competence	Uneven access; absence of Cantonese-language provision; Cantonese–Mandarin emotional communication gap; harmful/mismatched encounters; deterrents (residency, privacy).	E & H (language ceiling; E one harmful encounter), G & D (enabling access), B (residency deterrent), A (privacy distrust).
	Cultural & linguistic environment	Cantonese recognition vs erasure; hierarchy / “teacher” culture; relational-first vs rule-first logic; gendered vulnerability; incomplete belonging.	A (Cantonese erasure), B & Z (teacher culture), E (rule-first clash; gendered harm), H (indirect-refusal anxiety).
Individual factors	Trauma history, coping, help-seeking, resilience, identity	Pre-migration trauma and reactivation; coping and meaning-making; mental-health literacy and help-seeking; temperament and future orientation; identity and settlement orientation.	D & B & G (reactivation), F & A & C (meaning-making), G & Z & F (resilience/future orientation), spectrum A→F/Z (identity).

3. Research Questions and Objectives

Primary Research Question: How do social and political determinants shape mental health vulnerability, resilience, and help-seeking among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. How do pre-migration political experiences and post-migration conditions shape the mental health trajectories of post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan?
2. How do immigration pathways, residency uncertainty, occupational conditions, and institutional barriers shape psychological vulnerability and mental health help-seeking?
3. How do healthcare access, social support, and community resources function as protective or insufficient forms of support for mental health?
4. How do cultural proximity, language, and social inclusion shape participants' experiences of adaptation, belonging, and recognition in Taiwan?

Research Objectives:

- 
1. To document the lived mental health experiences of post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan through trauma-informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.
 2. To identify the social and political conditions that shape participants' vulnerability and resilience, with particular attention to immigration status, institutional uncertainty, occupational conditions, healthcare access, social support, and cultural adaptation.
 3. To analyse how pre-migration political experiences continue to affect participants' post-migration lives, including their sense of safety, identity, belonging, and future orientation.
 4. To examine how participants understand, access, avoid, or negotiate mental health support within Taiwan's healthcare, educational, community, and immigration-related systems.
 5. To develop empirically grounded recommendations for policy, institutional practice, and culturally appropriate mental health support for post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan.

III. Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology designed for the systematic exploration of how individuals make sense of significant lived experiences [37]. IPA was selected for its particular suitability to the research aims: it prioritised the participant's own meaning-making processes while acknowledging the active interpretive role of the researcher, a dynamic characterised in IPA literature as the double hermeneutic [37]. Given the politically sensitive and personally complex nature of post-2019 Hong Kong migration experiences, IPA's commitment to idiographic depth over statistical breadth was methodologically appropriate. The study was further guided by trauma-informed research principles throughout [15], in recognition that participants may have been navigating ongoing and unresolved political trauma alongside the adaptive challenges of immigration.

The analytical approach integrated both inductive and deductive elements: remaining open to emergent themes arising from participants' accounts while drawing on the social and political determinants of health as a sensitising theoretical framework [35]. This integration was appropriate given the study's dual focus on understanding individual meaning-making processes and examining how macro-level structural and political forces manifested in those processes.



2. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity



Reflexivity is integral to the rigour of IPA methodology, requiring the researcher to acknowledge how positionality shapes data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout the research process [37]. The researcher is a post-2019 Hong Kong immigrant who relocated to Taiwan in 2021 under the professional immigration scheme (HF160), holding a healthcare-related professional registration certificate issued by the Hong Kong government. This immigration pathway applies to individuals possessing professional technical capacity with a government-recognised practising certificate or demonstrating special achievement in specified professional fields [38]. It shared structural features with several participants' immigration pathways and afforded the researcher direct experiential insight into visa-related administrative processes, occupational integration challenges, and the institutional context navigated by the study population.

Having been resident in Hong Kong during the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Movement, the researcher witnessed the social and political upheaval that precipitated many participants' decisions to emigrate. The researcher subsequently experienced the permanent residency application process in Taiwan firsthand, including encounters with supplementary document requests from the immigration authority that produced periods of administrative uncertainty and associated psychological stress. This lived

experience constituted a form of insider knowledge that facilitated empathic engagement with participants' accounts and sensitivity to culturally embedded meanings; it simultaneously required active reflexive management to prevent over-identification or the unconscious projection of the researcher's own experience onto participants' narratives.

Beyond administrative uncertainty, the researcher navigated the material insecurities characteristic of professional immigration under a work-linked visa scheme, where employment status and immigration standing remained structurally interdependent. The absence of stable employment brought about implications not only for livelihood but for continued legal residence, a condition of precarity that mirrored stressors reported by participants across multiple immigration pathways. The prospect of permanent residency carried psychological weight beyond its legal function, representing a threshold of security and belonging whose opaque and shifting timeline generated sustained anticipatory stress.

Hong Kongers characteristically communicate through a hybrid of Cantonese and English, code-switching fluidly between the two in everyday contexts. The researcher possesses full linguistic and cultural competency in both, enabling nuanced interpretation of idiomatic, colloquial, and culturally specific expressions that may not be accessible to researchers outside this cultural community. This insider linguistic

competency was particularly important for capturing the full range of meaning in participants' accounts, including culturally embedded emotional vocabulary, politically specific references, and the layered communicative practices distinctive to Hong Kong Cantonese speakers [39].

At the same time, the researcher's own linguistic practice in Taiwan reflected conscious self-monitoring: the suppression of politically explicit vocabulary and the adoption of communicative registers oriented toward social integration. This self-censorship was driven in part by concern that openly political speech could jeopardise the permanent residency application, and in part by the high-context communicative norms of Taiwanese society, where indirect expression and careful register selection carry significant social weight. This lived experience of linguistic self-regulation informed the researcher's sensitivity to similar dynamics in participants' accounts, while simultaneously prompting reflexive scrutiny of whether this disposition unconsciously shaped the communicative frame of interviews.

Deliberate effort was made throughout each interview to maintain the distinction between the researcher's own experiences and those of the participant, and to avoid over-projecting personal responses onto participants' accounts. Trauma-informed interview protocols were consistently applied, and no acute emotional episodes arose during any interview. Following several interviews, however, the researcher

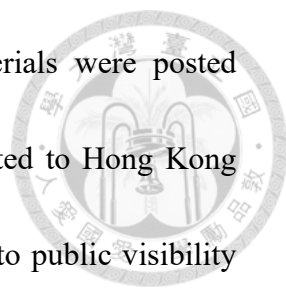
experienced a degree of emotional exhaustion attributable to the emotional labour of sustained empathic engagement with accounts that resonated with personal, if now mild and substantially processed, experiences of migration and political displacement. To address personal emotions arising from the research process, the researcher engaged in regular consultations with the university counselling service throughout the data collection and analysis period. This self-care practice was considered integral to maintaining researcher wellbeing and to ensuring that unprocessed personal emotion did not distort analytical judgement.

Throughout data collection and analysis, a reflexive journal was maintained documenting the researcher's initial responses, interpretive assumptions, and moments of particular resonance with or divergence from personal experience. Regular supervisory debriefing sessions with the thesis supervisor served as an additional mechanism for critical examination of emerging interpretations and analytical decisions, supporting both methodological rigour and researcher wellbeing.

3. Participant Recruitment and Selection

3.1 Recruitment Process

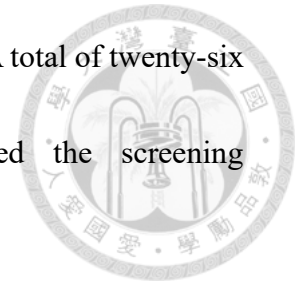
The IRB approved the study on 26 December 2025 (NTU-REC No. 202510HS033), and the researcher received formal notification of approval in early January 2026. Open



recruitment commenced on 14 January 2026. Recruitment materials were posted publicly on the researcher's personal Threads account and submitted to Hong Kong immigrant Facebook groups in Taiwan. The Threads post was set to public visibility and received more than fifteen reposts from both Hong Kong immigrants and members of local Taiwanese networks, and approximately ten direct forwarded shares. Approval from the administrators of Hong Kong immigrant Facebook groups was delayed until late January 2026; consequently, an estimated three of the eventual respondents were reached via Facebook, with the remainder recruited primarily through Threads. Recruitment was additionally supported through direct WhatsApp outreach via known Hong Kong immigrant networks in Taiwan and through in-person contact with locally operated Hong Kong businesses in Taiwan.

All prospective participants were screened through a structured Google Forms questionnaire prior to consideration for selection. The questionnaire collected information on preferred name and contact method, age, gender, date and duration of Taiwan residence, primary immigration category, current occupation and industry, and marital status. It additionally included two screening questions addressing current severe mental health symptoms significantly impairing daily functioning and the presence of self-harm or suicidal ideation within the preceding three months. Further items confirmed willingness to participate in a 60- to 90-minute Cantonese-language

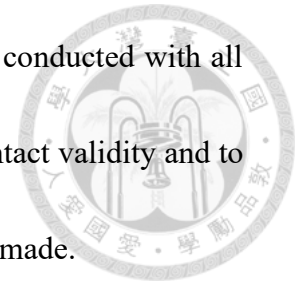
interview, preferred interview format, and scheduling availability. A total of twenty-six individuals submitted questionnaire responses and completed the screening questionnaire.



The respondent pool was male-skewed, with 17 male and 9 female respondents, and no respondents identifying as non-binary. Most respondents were aged 25–44 and had lived in Taiwan for more than three years. The two main immigration categories were education/study and work/employment, while family reunification and political asylum were less common; no respondents reported investment immigration as their primary pathway. Marital status was mixed, with 11 single respondents and 15 married or in a relationship. Screening questions on severe mental health symptoms, self-harm, and suicidal ideation were used for ethical and safety purposes rather than diagnostic assessment. Respondents who met the exclusion criteria were not included in the interview sample and were provided with referral information. From the eligible respondents, nine participants were purposively selected to maximise variation in gender, age, immigration pathway, employment or student status, family position, and prior social movement involvement.

Each respondent excluded on mental-health safety grounds was provided with contact information for a Cantonese-speaking counselling psychologist experienced in political trauma, in accordance with the study's ethical commitment to participant welfare [40].

An initial contact via telephone call, email, or direct message was conducted with all remaining eligible respondents prior to final selection, to verify contact validity and to establish basic rapport before the purposive sampling decision was made.



3.2 Purposive Sampling and Sample Composition

Final participant selection employed purposive sampling to maximise heterogeneity across key demographic and contextual variables [41], including gender, immigration pathway, level of prior social movement involvement, occupation, marital status, length of Taiwan residence, and current professional integration status. Gender, immigration pathway, residence duration, marital status, and employment or student status were considered during purposive sampling to support heterogeneity. These characteristics were used to contextualise participants' experiences rather than to conduct demographic comparison [42]. Demographic characteristics were drawn from questionnaire responses and confirmed during initial contact. The final sample of nine participants was selected to distribute representation across these dimensions and to capture the range of experiences within the post-2019 Hong Kong immigrant population in Taiwan, rather than to achieve proportional demographic representation. Specific ages were omitted from the table to reduce traceability risk, given the small and identifiable nature of the study community, participants are instead described by age range in the condensed case summaries.

Participant demographic profiles are presented in below.



Table 3 Participants' particulars.

<u>Code</u>	<u>Gender:</u>	<u>Length of Residence in Taiwan</u>	<u>Primary category for moving to Taiwan</u>	<u>Marital status</u>
A	Man	More than 3 years	Work/Employment	Single
B	Man	More than 3 years	Family reunification	Married
C	Man	More than 3 years	Education/Study	Single
D	Woman	2-3 years	Work/Employment	In a relationship
E	Woman	2-3 years	Education/Study	Single
F	Man	More than 3 years	Family reunification	Married
G	Man	More than 3 years	Education/Study	Single
H	Woman	More than 3 years	Education/Study	In a relationship
Z	Man	More than 3 years	Family reunification	Married

3.3 Inclusion of Participant Z: Rationale

Participant Z's decision to relocate to Taiwan was driven primarily by concerns about his child's educational needs and the perceived benefits of Taiwan's lower-pressure educational environment, a migration motivation distinct from the explicitly political or economic rationales cited by other participants. While the study's inclusion criteria specified migration from Hong Kong to Taiwan after September 2019, Participant Z

relocated within months of this threshold, during the period of escalating social unrest.

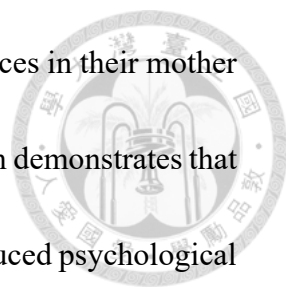
However, he continued travelling regularly between Taiwan and Hong Kong for work throughout the movement period, and his definitive settlement in Taiwan consolidated within the timeframe covered by this study; his case was therefore retained as a deliberate boundary case.

Although his migration was not primarily politically motivated, his departure occurred within the broader sociopolitical context that defined the study population, and the structural and institutional conditions he encountered in Taiwan were analytically comparable to those faced by politically motivated migrants.

His inclusion was considered appropriate on the grounds that it enhanced sample diversity, captured a migration motivation anchored in child welfare and educational environment that was empirically relevant to understanding differential mental health determinants within this population, and contributed to the study's aim of examining non-political migration pathways within the same structural context. His case thus enriched rather than compromised the analytical rigour of the cross-case comparison.

4. Data Collection

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in March 2026, each lasting approximately 2 to 2.5 hours. All interviews were conducted in Cantonese to ensure



participants could express complex emotional and political experiences in their mother tongue. The full interview guide is provided in Appendix A. Research demonstrates that trauma survivors access deeper narrative content and experience reduced psychological stress when interviewed in their native language, particularly when discussing politically sensitive experiences [39, 43]. This consideration was especially pertinent for Hong Kong immigrants, some of whom associate Mandarin with mainland Chinese authorities, potentially creating additional psychological barriers to candid disclosure. Participants retained the option to incorporate English phrases or switch partially to English at their discretion, consistent with the naturalistic code-switching patterns of Hong Kong Cantonese speakers. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' prior written or verbal informed consent, with participants retaining control over recording start and stop times throughout each session. At least one participant exercised this option to pause the recording for specific content; such content was also excluded from the field notes at the participant's request.

The interview framework followed trauma-informed principles throughout [15], including explicit establishment of participant control over interview pacing and content boundaries, clear communication regarding voluntary participation and the unconditional right to withdraw, and consistent emphasis on participant strengths and resilience alongside exploration of challenges, to avoid pathologising participants'

responses to political displacement. The interview guide in the Appendix A explored core topic areas including participants' pre-migration lives and political experiences, the migration decision-making process, legal status and immigration pathway experiences, cultural and occupational integration, social support networks and community belonging, mental health experiences and help-seeking, and future settlement orientation. Each interview was preceded by a briefing confirming confidentiality procedures and followed by a brief wellbeing check-in, with referral information for Cantonese-speaking mental health professionals available as required.

While a consistent interview guide underpinned all nine interviews, the concurrent analytical process informed subsequent data collection in a manner consistent with IPA's iterative design. As themes emerged across earlier cases, additional questions were incorporated into later interviews to ensure systematic cross-case exploration of analytically significant topics. Following Participant E's account of gendered vulnerability and workplace dynamics, subsequent interviews incorporated more explicit questions about gendered experiences of integration. Following Participant A's reflections on Cantonese linguistic identity and its irreplaceability in emotional expression, language and linguistic belonging became a more deliberately probed area in subsequent sessions. Following Participant D's account of post-graduation occupational constraints and visa status transitions, questions about the job-seeking

period and its structural implications were explicitly raised with Participant G. These iterative adjustments strengthened cross-case comparability without compromising the open-ended character of individual interviews, and are consistent with IPA's commitment to allowing the data to shape the analytical focus as the study develops.

5. Transcription, Field Notes, and Translation

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using PLAUD AI transcription software. Following generation of each verbatim transcript, audio files were deleted from the AI platform after secure backup to an encrypted local device, consistent with the study's data security and confidentiality protocols. Each transcript was subsequently reviewed against the corresponding audio recording multiple times to verify accuracy and to correct any errors introduced during automated transcription.

Alongside verbatim transcription, the researcher maintained a physical field notebook during each interview, recording non-verbal cues including gestures, facial expressions, tonal shifts, prolonged pauses, laughter, and emotional responses whose interpretive significance extended beyond the verbal record. These handwritten notes were subsequently digitised and incorporated into the corresponding transcript to produce full field notes for each case, integrating verbal and non-verbal data into a single analytical document.

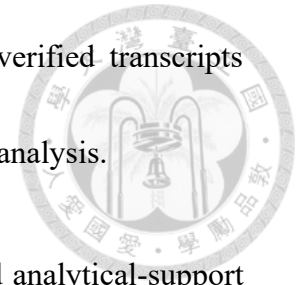
The researcher's deep familiarity with Hong Kong history, culture, and linguistic practice enabled contextual interpretation of culturally embedded meanings, idiomatic expressions, and politically specific references that may not be directly accessible through literal text. For passages whose intended meaning remained uncertain after contextual interpretation, the researcher sought clarification directly from the relevant participant prior to finalising the field notes, consistent with the study's commitment to interpretive accuracy and participant agency.

Following completion of the Cantonese-language field notes and verbatim transcripts, the researcher produced English-language translations of analytically relevant passages. Translation prioritised semantic and conceptual equivalence over literal word-for-word rendering. Where Cantonese or culturally specific expressions carried meanings not directly translatable into English, both the original Cantonese term and an explanatory English rendering were provided in the analysis. This approach preserved cultural specificity while enabling interpretation by readers outside the source culture, consistent with recommended practice for translated qualitative data [39].

5.1 Methodological Note on AI-Assisted Tools

AI-assisted tools were used in limited and supervised ways during the research process. PLAUD AI was used only to generate initial verbatim transcript drafts from the interview audio recordings. Each transcript was then reviewed and corrected manually

by the researcher against the original audio recording, and the verified transcripts formed the basis for coding, field-note integration, translation, and analysis.



Separately, the researcher used Claude as a local-drive writing and analytical-support tool during later stages of the research process. This use included discussing coding structure, testing the logic of theme and subtheme organisation, identifying possible anonymisation and masking strategies, checking potential traceability risks, and improving the grammar and clarity of draft writing. Claude was not used to replace idiographic case analysis, independently determine final codes or themes, or make final interpretive decisions. All coding decisions, participant interpretations, quotation selection, translation, masking decisions, and final analytical claims were reviewed and determined by the researcher.

Given the political sensitivity of the topic, AI-assisted support was used with particular attention to confidentiality. Identifying details were removed, generalised, or critically reviewed during the masking process, and any AI-assisted wording was checked against the verified transcripts, field notes, and participant summaries before incorporation into the thesis.

6. Data Analysis: Applied IPA Procedure

Analysis proceeded through Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's six-stage IPA framework [37],

following the idiographic-to-comparative progression described below. Analysis of each case commenced promptly following the corresponding interview, enabling concurrent preliminary coding during the data collection period and allowing emerging observations to inform subsequent interviews while maintaining IPA's commitment to each participant's unique account. Each case was analysed as a discrete unit before cross-case comparison commenced, in keeping with IPA's idiographic principle.

6.1 Analytical Approach: Idiographic to Comparative Analysis

Following IPA methodology, analysis proceeded in two stages: first, idiographic case analysis to understand each participant's lived experience in depth; and second, cross-case thematic comparison to identify convergences and divergences across accounts, leading to mechanism-based analytical positioning of participants. This staged approach aligned with IPA's commitment to understanding individual meaning-making while capturing patterns relevant to the research questions. Rather than imposing predetermined categories onto the data, the analysis identified themes emerging from participants' accounts and organised these into a hierarchical structure connecting to the analytical framework. The integration of both inductive and deductive elements reflected the study's dual focus on lived experience and structural determinants.

6.2 Applied Six-Stage IPA Process

Verbatim transcripts and field notes were imported into Microsoft Word, where the six-

stage IPA analytical procedure was applied to each case in turn.



- Stage 1, Reading and Re-reading: Each transcript was read multiple times to achieve immersive engagement with the participant's experiential world. Initial impressions, emotional resonances, and emerging questions were documented during this stage, with preconceptions and theoretical assumptions set aside as far as possible.
- Stage 2, Initial Noting: Line-by-line analysis identified three types of annotations applied directly within the transcript document: descriptive notes capturing explicit content and primary concerns; linguistic notes attending to metaphor, hedging, tone, and idiomatic expression; and conceptual notes offering preliminary interpretive observations about underlying meaning-making processes. Emerging questions and areas of analytical uncertainty were also marked within the document as they arose.
- Stage 3, Developing Emergent Themes: Initial notes were transformed into emergent themes capturing the essential qualities of each participant's account, grounded in participants' own language while incorporating interpretive insight. Particular attention was paid to how themes related to each participant's specific circumstances and migration pathway.
- Stage 4, Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes: Themes within

each case were examined for patterns, connections, and relationships, identifying superordinate themes that captured higher-level meanings and subordinate themes providing nuanced detail. Particular attention was paid to how pre-migration experiences, current stressors, and protective factors interacted within individual accounts.

- Stage 5, Moving to the Next Case: Each subsequent case was analysed independently following Stages 1 to 4, maintaining analytical bracketing to prevent earlier cases from unduly influencing the interpretation of later ones. This idiographic commitment ensured that each participant's unique perspective was fully explored before cross-case patterns were identified.
- Stage 6, Looking for Patterns Across Cases: The final stage examined themes across all nine participants to identify shared patterns while preserving individual variation. This cross-case analysis specifically addressed the research questions about differential vulnerability and protective mechanisms and how they interacted across different structural and personal configurations.

Emergent themes from each case were initially organised using NVivo 15 (QSR International). Due to repeated software instability on the researcher's device, the full analytical framework was subsequently transferred to Microsoft Excel, which provided a stable local storage environment consistent with the study's data security requirements.

The resulting analytical framework constituted the primary analytical record and formed the basis for cross-case comparison.



6.3 Trauma-Informed Analytical Approaches

Given the trauma-related content of participants' accounts, trauma-informed principles were applied throughout the analytical process, extending beyond interview protocols into the analytical procedure itself. The analysis proceeded with the recognition that trauma narratives may be fragmented, non-linear, or elliptical rather than chronologically ordered, and that such structural characteristics carried interpretive meaning rather than representing narrative deficiency. Attention was paid to both what participants stated explicitly and what was communicated through indirect or figurative means.

Across the dataset, participants frequently communicated emotionally significant experiences, personal encounters, and political views through indirect metaphors and figurative language rather than direct description. This was particularly evident in accounts of political trauma, occupational frustration, and the experience of cultural displacement, where culturally specific imagery and colloquial expression carried layers of meaning that would have been lost through literal translation or surface-level coding. These figurative patterns were incorporated into the analytical record as primary data, with interpretive notes attending to the communicative function of the

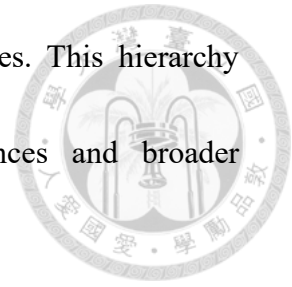
figurative choices made.

The analysis also remained attentive to narrative fragmentation and non-linearity as analytically meaningful features. Where participants moved between time periods, interrupted their own accounts, or returned repeatedly to particular events, these patterns were examined for what they revealed about the psychological salience of specific experiences and the ways in which pre-migration and post-migration experiences remained interconnected in participants' meaning-making. The analysis further maintained awareness that political trauma may create ongoing concerns about surveillance and safety that influence narrative construction, attending to how participants navigated discussing politically sensitive topics and examining the communicative strategies employed when participants approached these subjects.

6.4 Thematic Organisation: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Following the ten coding domains developed through initial case analysis (Pre-Migration Context and Decision-Making; Legal Status and Immigration Schemes; Early Adaptation and Practical Integration; Cultural and Linguistic Adaptation; Occupational Integration and Professional Challenges; Mental Health, Psychological Support, and Coping; Social Support Networks and Belonging; Education and Student-Pathway Specific Experiences; Visa Pathway and Institutional Exposure; and Political Trauma, Identity, and Long-Term Commitment), the analysis organised these domains

into three superordinate themes with subordinate theme structures. This hierarchy reflected the conceptual relationships between lived experiences and broader determinant pathways.



The three superordinate themes, along with their subordinate themes, are as follows.

- Superordinate Theme 1, Political Displacement Continues After Migration, encompassed two subordinate themes: threshold, accumulation, mixed-motive, and planned pathways into migration; and trauma dormancy, reactivation, political vigilance, and moral powerlessness. This theme examined how political conditions that motivated or contextualised migration continued to operate in participants' psychological, social, and creative lives after arrival in Taiwan, and how different temporal structures of migration produced different configurations of ongoing distress.
- Superordinate Theme 2, Institutional Precarity and Protective Infrastructure Shape Vulnerability, encompassed two subordinate themes: visa status, residency uncertainty, credential recognition, employer dependency, and occupational reset; and healthcare access, social support, and help-seeking as protective infrastructure. This theme examined how structural conditions governing participants' presence in Taiwan actively determined mental health vulnerability and resilience, attending both to sources of institutional precarity

and to the protective factors that, when present, mitigated those vulnerabilities.

- Superordinate Theme 3, Cultural Adaptation and Incomplete Belonging, encompassed three subordinate themes: language, emotional expression, Cantonese recognition, and belonging; hierarchy culture, gendered vulnerability, and the cost of correction; and identity and settlement orientation. This theme examined how the partial and uneven nature of cultural adaptation produced distinctive difficulties for Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan, including the limits of linguistic proximity, the social cost of norm violations, and the divergence between legal incorporation and cultural belonging.

6.5 Cross-Case Comparative Analysis and Mechanism-Based Analytical

Positioning

Cross-case comparison was structured through a comparative matrix mapping which cases exemplified each theme and how themes manifested differently across participants. The matrix served to identify universalising patterns present across all or nearly all cases, differentiating patterns present in specific configurations, and unique elements distinctive to individual cases. Comparison examined, among other questions, whether gender shaped help-seeking patterns, whether different visa pathways created distinct stressor configurations, and whether the nature of pre-migration political involvement predicted post-migration mental health trajectories.

During early cross-case analysis, preliminary vulnerability profiles were developed.

Three profiles initially appeared: one describing participants characterised by higher pre-migration political involvement, elevated psychological distress, and precarious visa pathways; one describing participants with minimal direct social movement involvement, stable family support structures, and family or education-driven migration; and one describing participants with more rapid professional integration and employment-based status stability. These profiles were treated as heuristic tools for organising initial cross-case patterns rather than as fixed categories.

These preliminary profiles were subsequently refined into mechanism-based analytical positionings, because several participants complicated or crossed the initial categories.

Participant E's distress pathway was shaped primarily by politically induced vocational displacement, COVID constraints, academic and gendered hierarchy, and harmful therapeutic encounters, rather than by direct political trauma, which characterised the initial Profile 1 grouping. Participant H's situation was characterised by structural entrapment through employer-linked work residency and economic constraint, rather than credential advantage, which distinguished her from participants initially grouped in Profile 3. Participant C's migration was mixed-motive, involving both career planning and political catalysis, rather than being straightforwardly non-political as implied by Profile 2. Participant F's primary post-migration stressor was illness relapse

rather than migration adaptation or political experience, and his political feeling took the form of moral powerlessness redirected into meaning-making rather than direct trauma. The structural routes of Participants B, F, and Z, while all involving spousal or family-related dependency, created fundamentally different settlement infrastructures depending on whether the anchoring family member was a Taiwanese national or held a Hong Kong-specific immigration status.

The final analysis therefore compared participants according to the mechanisms through which political displacement, legal status, occupational conditions, healthcare access, social support, cultural adaptation, and identity shaped vulnerability or resilience, rather than by surface labels such as migration route, visa category, or political or non-political migrant status. Each participant was positioned analytically through the primary mechanism that shaped their trajectory, and these positionings were used as interpretive lenses throughout the cross-case analysis.

Participant G was treated as a resilience trajectory rather than assigned to a fixed positioning. He entered Taiwan with acute vulnerability resulting from frontline political participation, a physical injury, acute psychiatric symptoms during quarantine, and severe social isolation at his first university. Over approximately three years, he achieved stable professional integration, financial independence, and a clear long-term orientation toward Taiwan. His trajectory was used throughout the analysis to identify

the protective factors that enabled this shift, including Mandarin fluency, deliberate social network construction outside the Hong Kong immigrant community, performance-based employment, and the restoration of family relationships through physical distance.

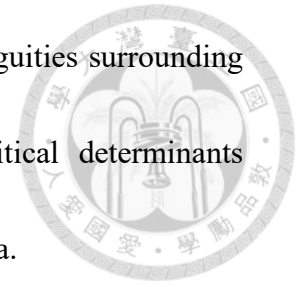


6.6 Theoretical Integration: Social and Political Determinants of Health

The analysis mapped identified themes onto the social determinants of health framework [35], which specifies layers of structural, intermediary, and individual determinants shaping health outcomes. For post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan, structural determinants included the immigration policy framework, the geopolitical relationship between Taiwan and Hong Kong, and institutional requirements for professional credential recognition. Intermediary determinants included employment and income security, social support networks, healthcare system accessibility, and occupational integration opportunities. Individual factors included pre-migration trauma history, coping capacities, health-seeking behaviours, and psychological resilience.

The analysis additionally incorporated political determinants of health, recognising that mental health outcomes were shaped not only by conventional social determinants but by political systems, geopolitical positioning, and how states recognised or contested the legal and social standing of migrant populations [8, 9, 14, 36]. Taiwan's specific

geopolitical relationship to Hong Kong and the institutional ambiguities surrounding the recognition of Hong Kong immigrants functioned as political determinants distinctly shaping the mental health experiences captured in the data.



7. Quality Assurance and Rigour

7.1 Member Checking

Following completion of interview transcription and field note integration, two forms of case documentation were prepared for each participant: a condensed case summary capturing key themes and representative quotations, and a full case summary providing a comprehensive narrative account. Both documents were produced in Traditional Chinese to ensure accessibility, drawing directly from the Cantonese-language transcripts and field notes.

Condensed summaries were transmitted to participants via their preferred secure messaging platform and participants were invited to confirm that the summary accurately represented their experiences, to raise any concerns about interpretation or misrepresentation, and to indicate any themes or content they did not wish to be included before summaries were incorporated into analysis. All identifiable details in condensed summaries intended for inclusion in the thesis appendix were masked or sufficiently generalised to protect participant anonymity. Condensed case summaries

form Appendix of this thesis.



For the full case summaries, which contained richer biographical detail and were shared with the thesis supervisor, explicit participant permission was sought prior to sharing.

A degree of identifiable detail was retained to provide the supervisor with sufficient contextual depth to evaluate the analysis, on the understanding that these documents remained confidential to the immediate research team.

7.2 Supervisory Debriefing

Regular debriefing sessions with the thesis supervisor were conducted throughout the analytical process. These sessions served to examine emerging themes and interpretations, to identify potential analytical blind spots arising from the researcher's insider positionality, and to provide methodological oversight. They additionally served as a form of emotional support for the researcher given the personally resonant nature of the interview content, consistent with recommended practice in trauma-informed qualitative research [15].

7.3 Reflexive Practice

The reflexive journal maintained throughout data collection and analysis provided an ongoing record of interpretive decisions, emotional responses, and moments of personal resonance with participant accounts. This journal formed part of the quality assurance

process, enabling the researcher to distinguish interpretations grounded in participant accounts from those potentially shaped by the researcher's own migration experiences. Reflexive notes were reviewed periodically during supervisory debriefing sessions to ensure that insider knowledge served the analysis rather than distorted it.

8. Data Management and Confidentiality

Transcription was conducted entirely by the researcher to prevent third-party exposure to participant data. All interview transcripts were initially produced after pseudonyms in alphabetical letter codes were assigned, with real names systematically replaced throughout all analytical documents. A master list linking pseudonym codes to participant identification details was maintained separately from all analytical files and stored on an encrypted local device accessible only to the researcher.

Particular care was taken to remove or disguise identifying information from all documents shared beyond the principal researcher, including specific workplaces, educational institutions, medical conditions, and unique biographical details that could compromise participant anonymity. This was considered especially important given the politically sensitive nature of participants' circumstances, where identifying information could in principle create risks beyond the immediate research context.

AI-assisted tools were used as described in Section 5.1. Consistent with the data

management approach described throughout this section, no research data were uploaded to general-purpose cloud storage at any stage of the workflow. The analytical framework was maintained in Microsoft Excel rather than NVivo, as local file storage on an encrypted device was considered preferable to software with networked or cloud-based components.

Physical field notebooks containing handwritten observational notes from each interview were stored in a locked location accessible only to the researcher. Following digitisation and incorporation of their contents into the electronic field notes, the physical notebooks were retained securely for the duration of the study period.

In accordance with the approved IRB application, all research data, including transcripts, field notes, analytical documents, and the pseudonym master list, will be retained until December 2026. Following this retention period, electronic files will be permanently deleted and physical materials, including the field notebooks, will be securely destroyed.

9. Ethical Considerations

This research involved several sensitive ethical considerations requiring careful attention:

Participant Safety and Confidentiality: Given the politically sensitive nature of

participants' circumstances, enhanced confidentiality measures were implemented [15]. All identifying information were removed from transcripts, participants were assigned pseudonyms, and data were stored on encrypted devices with restricted access.

Special attention will be paid to avoiding any details that could compromise participant safety or anonymity.

Informed Consent: Participants received comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research participants [40]. Given political sensitivities, verbal consent options were explored if participants had concerns about written documentation, with proper ethical committee approval.

Psychological Distress Management: The interview process may have evoked distressing memories related to political persecution or current stressors. Trauma-informed interview protocols were followed, and a referral network of Cantonese-speaking mental health professionals had been established [15]. Participants retained control over interview pacing and content boundaries.

Cultural Sensitivity: Interviews were conducted in Cantonese to minimize linguistic barriers and reduce psychological stress associated with discussing trauma in non-native languages.

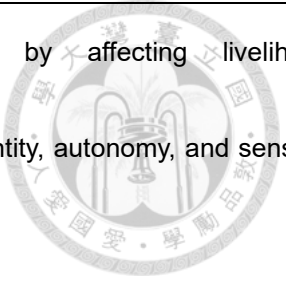


IV. Findings

Before presenting the detailed analysis, Table 4 provides an overview of the superordinate and subordinate themes developed through the IPA process. The table is intended as an analytical map rather than a substitute for the idiographic findings that follow. It summarises how participants' experiences were organised across three interconnected domains: continuing political displacement, institutional precarity and protective infrastructure, and cultural adaptation with incomplete belonging.

Table 4 Overview of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

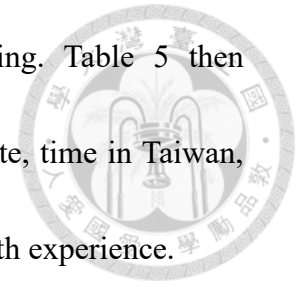
<u>Superordinate theme</u>	<u>Subtheme</u>	<u>Core analytical meaning</u>
1. Political displacement continues after migration	1a. Threshold, accumulation, mixed-motive, and planned pathways into migration	Political trauma did not simply end after leaving Hong Kong; it became dormant, reactivated by news/events, and sustained through worry, guilt, and vigilance.
	1b. Trauma dormancy, reactivation, political vigilance, and moral powerlessness	Legal and occupational insecurity shaped mental health by affecting livelihood, professional identity, autonomy, and sense of future safety.
2. Institutional	2a. Visa status, residency uncertainty,	Legal and occupational insecurity shaped

precarity and protective infrastructure shape vulnerability	credential recognition, employer dependency, and occupational reset	mental health by affecting livelihood, professional identity, autonomy, and sense of future safety. 
	2b. Healthcare access, social support, and help-seeking as protective infrastructure	Mental health improved when participants had access to healthcare, supportive relationships, counselling, religion, or peer networks, but these protections were uneven.
3. Cultural adaptation and incomplete belonging	3a. Language, emotional expression, Cantonese recognition, and belonging	Everyday Mandarin ability did not necessarily translate into emotional or therapeutic expression; Cantonese recognition became tied to safety and belonging.
	3b. Hierarchy culture, gendered vulnerability, and the cost of correction	Workplace and social hierarchy created stress, especially where participants felt unable to correct unfair treatment or assert themselves without social cost.
	3c. Identity and settlement orientation	Participants differed in whether they imagined Taiwan as temporary refuge, long-term home, or uncertain settlement, shaping their mental health trajectories.

This chapter presents the findings of a cross-case interpretative phenomenological analysis of nine interviews conducted with post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan in March 2026. Following idiographic examination of each case, cross-case comparison yielded three superordinate themes, each encompassing subordinate themes. Throughout the analysis, participants were compared by the mechanisms through which political displacement, legal status, occupational conditions, healthcare access, social support, cultural adaptation, and identity shaped vulnerability or resilience, not by surface labels such as visa category, migration route, or political or non-political migrant status.

The core analytical finding that runs through all three themes is as follows. Mental health vulnerability among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan did not arise from migration alone, political trauma alone, or cultural difference alone. Vulnerability emerged when political displacement, legal uncertainty, occupational disruption, hierarchy culture, language constraints, gendered power relations, and weak institutional recognition converged in specific configurations. Conversely, stability emerged when healthcare accessibility, secure or usable legal status, family or faith support, meaningful work, institutional care, and future-oriented identity provided protective infrastructure. Taiwan's cultural proximity helped some participants settle, but it did not remove deeper barriers around hierarchy, Cantonese recognition,

professional accountability, gendered vulnerability, and belonging. Table 5 then compares all nine participants systematically across migration route, time in Taiwan, political, social, and cultural factors, help-seeking, and mental-health experience.



Analytical Positioning of Participants

The following brief positionings are not case summaries. Condensed case summaries appear in the appendix. These entries identify the main analytical mechanism through which each participant contributes to the cross-case analysis.

Participant A: His professional visa gave him formal mobility and autonomy, but not institutional trust, professional accountability, Cantonese recognition, or settlement belonging. This represented a configuration of formal inclusion without normative recognition.

Participant B: His dependent residency under his spouse's professional visa created a structure of legal uncertainty distinct from Taiwanese-spouse dependency routes. His vulnerability was shaped by prolonged residency uncertainty, arts-sector credential non-recognition, and political vigilance, while community resources became protective over time.

Participant C: His migration was shaped by both career planning and politics. The 2019 movement and National Security Law accelerated, intensified, and politically

reframed an existing professional and career trajectory rather than triggering political flight from scratch.



Participant D: A central case of direct embodied political trauma, including witnessed violence and sensory flashback. Her post-migration trajectory also shows meaningful stabilization through partner support, student networks, volunteering, positive healthcare access, and institutional mental health literacy.

Participant E: Her distress pathway was shaped not primarily by direct political trauma but by politically shaped vocational displacement, COVID constraints, academic pressure, gendered boundary violations and hierarchy culture, communication failure, and harmful therapeutic encounters.

Participant F: His primary post-migration stressor was illness relapse rather than migration adaptation or political trauma. Taiwan's healthcare accessibility, attentive care, spouse and in-law support, faith community, and meaning-making through contribution stabilized his mental health. His political feeling toward Hong Kong took the form of moral powerlessness, redirected into self-development.

Participant G: He entered Taiwan with acute political and psychological vulnerability and later stabilized through Mandarin fluency, deliberate social network construction, merit-based professional integration, financial independence, and the restoration of

family relations through physical distance.

Participant H: Her completion of tertiary education in Taiwan did not produce secure incorporation. Employer-linked work residency, low income, multiple concurrent jobs, restricted mobility, and an emotional communication gap between Cantonese and Mandarin created overlapping structural and therapeutic vulnerabilities.

Participant Z: His Taiwanese-spouse route, local family network, long-established familiarity with Taiwan, and a specialised professional skill set that was locally valued and less dependent on formal credential recognition supported comparatively smooth structural incorporation, while hierarchy culture remained a point of tension.

P.	Migration route	Time in TW	Political factors	Social factors	Cultural factors	Help-seeking	Mental-health experience and trajectory.
A	Professional visa; non-political, circumstantial (study route abroad foreclosed)	>3 yrs	Not politically motivated; experiences "apparent freedom and equality masking discrimination"; Cantonese erasure in public space.	Narrow: a mentor and a few older Hong Kong immigrants; little relational embeddedness at arrival.	Cantonese conflated with Mandarin; professional non-accountability; hierarchy resistant to correction.	None. Distrust of data privacy and professional ethics; self-manages via mentorship, physical training, faith.	Progressive disillusionment; "countdown" to leave after studies; managed, not acute clinical distress.
B	Dependent residency (spouse's professional visa); politically motivated	>3 yrs	Threshold departure on a symbolic event; ongoing self-censorship in creative work; official disrespect.	Informal ties: new-residents-centre peers, neighbourhood, faith; spouse's absences a stressor.	Arts-sector "teacher culture" / seniority; credential non-recognition; semantic mismatch.	None. Deterred by concern a mental-health record could affect residency; uses TCM, creative work, community.	Prolonged residency distress ("very depressing"); panic attacks on spouse absence; later earned-belonging identity, stable.
C	Overseas-Chinese-status student route; politically shaped, mixed-motive	>3 yrs	Social movement participation + NSL; processes cross-strait anxiety through an eschatological faith lens.	Parents (weekly contact), small Hong Kong peer circle, church and university societies; evening solitude a trigger.	Own directness reads as abrasive locally; Cantonese accent still marks him, without distress.	Sought medical advice for stress; no counselling; copes via activity, study, faith.	Broadly stable; grief over lost farewell and lost Hong Kong; positive, forward-looking settlement.
D	Student visa → work visa / professional role; politically driven (threshold)	2–3 yrs	2019 violence with embodied reactivation; background scrutiny in application; NGO/civic work legally restricted.	Partner (primary anchor), HK/Macau student association, volunteering, like-minded Taiwanese.	Minor frictions; indirect communication; traces of Cantonese structure in Mandarin.	No formal counselling, but attitude shifted by university self-care messaging; very positive on healthcare.	Embodied political trauma coexisting with meaningful stabilisation; regarded migration as the right decision.

(Table 5 continued on next page)

E	Student visa for further study; accumulation model (vocational displacement)	2–3 yrs	2014→2019→NSL self-censorship ("living in 1984"); career path foreclosed in Hong Kong.	Thin in Taiwan; anchors remain Hong Kong family and friends; in-programme ties largely negative.	情理法 vs 法理情 clash; hierarchy + gendered boundary violations inadequately handled; Cantonese emotional-register gap.	Multiple counselling encounters largely ineffective and one harmful; dual cultural gap + language; copes via reading, exercise, HK trips.	Genuinely ambivalent; compounded distress; provisional commitment; "tourist vs living" gap.
F	Family-based route, Taiwanese spouse → citizenship; not political (health-driven)	>3 yrs	Moral powerlessness / survivor guilt redirected into self-development; ruled out Hong Kong for its political environment.	Spouse and in-laws, faith community, volunteering; limited Hong Kong networks (isolated at a memorial event).	Hong Kong identity persists despite citizenship; belonging not conferred by shared origin.	None. No perceived need; exercise, faith community, reading, volunteering.	Generally stable; illness relapse (not migration) the main stressor; healthcare strongly protective.
G	Student pathway → work residence; directly political (planned departure)	>3 yrs	2019 involvement + NSL; planned exit; acute symptoms during quarantine after the threat had passed.	Deliberately avoided HK/Macau circle; built an international-student network; meaningful faculty follow-up.	Mandarin fluency eases integration; future orientation valued over origin identity.	Yes: psychiatric clinic and counselling via university; described as meaningful.	Acute early vulnerability → resilience via institutional stability, professional integration, future-oriented identity.
H	Student pathway → employer-linked work residency; practical / aspirational	>3 yrs	Limited explicit political motivation; migration eased by cultural/linguistic proximity.	Taiwanese partner (accompanied her to a clinic), a long-standing local friend, a workplace ally, few university friends; fragile Hong Kong ties.	Indirect-refusal anxiety; accent mockery; Cantonese emotional-register gap in therapy.	Yes: university counselling + ongoing psychiatric care and medication; cost and language concerns.	Structural entrapment (residency tied to job), low income, multiple jobs; ongoing distress, in treatment.
Z	Taiwanese-spouse route; family- and education-driven (not primarily political)	>3 yrs	Minimal political motivation; pragmatic outlook toward cross-strait uncertainty.	Spouse and extended family, professional and neighbourhood ties; limited Hong Kong networks.	Entrenched hierarchy in a specialised professional and educational setting; local civic participation supported belonging.	None. Optimistic temperament; family partnership as primary anchor.	Smooth incorporation; strong healthcare security; a protective settlement configuration.

Table 5 Nine-Participant Internal Comparison

Superordinate Theme 1: Political Displacement Continues After Migration

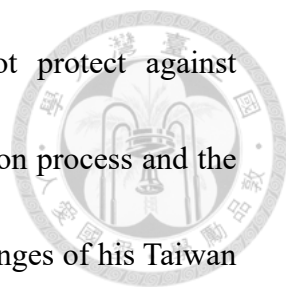


Political displacement did not conclude at the border. Across the nine cases, the political conditions that motivated or contextualised migration continued to operate in participants' psychological, social, creative, and civic lives after arrival in Taiwan. Two dimensions of this continuation are examined: the distinct pathways through which participants entered migration and the different structures of ongoing experience each produced; and the varied forms that politically rooted distress took in the migration context, including trauma and reactivation, habituated vigilance, and moral powerlessness.

1a. Threshold, Accumulation, Mixed-Motive, and Planned Pathways into Migration

Cross-case analysis identified five distinct temporal structures through which the political context shaped or framed the decision to migrate. These structures generated different experiences both at the point of departure and in the post-migration period, and they caution against treating Hong Kong immigrant mental health as a single, uniform response to political events.

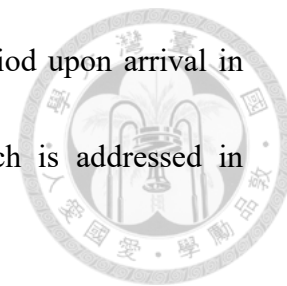
Participants B and D both exemplified the threshold model, though the nature of the triggering event differed. Participant B and his wife had designated a specific political event as their departure signal; when that event occurred, B acted immediately. The



decisiveness of the threshold reduced ambivalence but did not protect against subsequent structural difficulties: the prolonged residency application process and the occupational reset required by his field became the dominant challenges of his Taiwan years. Participant D's threshold was rooted in embodied exposure rather than a symbolic political event. She had directly witnessed political violence during the 2019 protests and subsequently experienced emotional and sensory reactivation. These responses were initially normalised as part of a collective experience, delaying recognition of their personal psychological impact and help-seeking at the time. These responses were initially normalised as part of a collective experience shared by those around her, which delayed recognition of the personal psychological impact and prevented help-seeking at the time. Both B and D shared the threshold structure of departure, but the distinction between symbolic and somatic triggers had consequences for the form that subsequent distress took: B's vulnerability concentrated in relational and legal uncertainty, D's in embodied reactivation.

Participant G illustrated the planned departure model. Following the enactment of the National Security Law, he formed a clear goal: to leave Hong Kong after completing secondary school regardless of what else occurred. The NSL foreclosed conditions of speech, engagement, and daily life he considered fundamental, converting migration from a possibility into a planned timeline. His acute psychiatric symptoms emerged not

during the period of political stress but during the quarantine period upon arrival in Taiwan, after the immediate threat had nominally passed, which is addressed in Subordinate Theme 1b.



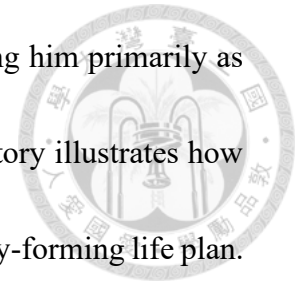
Participant E exemplified the accumulation model. Her political awareness formed during the 2014 social movement, deepened through 2019, and was compounded by the professional consequences of the National Security Law. Increasing self-censorship in her previous professional role made continuation of that career increasingly difficult. No single event made departure necessary; rather, cumulative political and vocational pressures reached a threshold she experienced as personally unsustainable.

Participant C illustrated the mixed-motive model. He had prior ambitions for professional study and career development that predated the 2019 movement. The movement, the violence he witnessed, and the National Security Law did not create a migration intention from nothing; they accelerated it, gave it urgency, and reframed it in explicitly political terms.

Translation: *"The National Security Law is purely draconian, it announced that Hong Kong no longer has a high degree of autonomy. 2019 was a warning signal, full of unresolved questions. Together these two things made me feel this was no longer the Hong Kong I grew up in. Hong Kong is dead. By then more and more KOLs were already saying it was time to leave."*¹

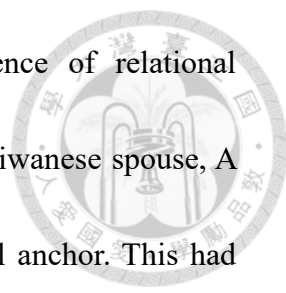
¹ **Original [Cantonese]:** 國安法純粹係嚴刑峻法，宣布呢個香港已經冇高度自治啦！19 年就係當時嘅警報同埋好多未解嘅迷團。呢兩樣嘢加埋就令我覺得呢個已經唔係我從前成長嘅香港，即係香港已死。真係嗰陣時都越嚟好多 KOL 都已經喺度吹話要走啦。

Framing C as non-political would misrepresent his account; framing him primarily as a traumatised political refugee would overstate the case. His trajectory illustrates how political events can catalyse, intensify, and morally charge an already-forming life plan.



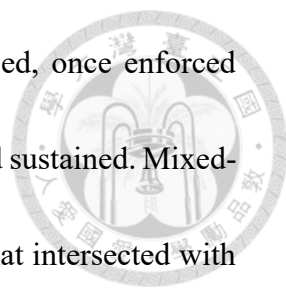
Participants Z, F, and A entered Taiwan through pathways that were not primarily politically motivated, yet the mechanisms and post-migration consequences of their arrival differed in analytically significant ways.

Z's migration predated the peak of the 2019 movement and was driven by his child's educational needs, combined with an existing family and professional connection to Taiwan. F's migration was structured primarily by his health condition, his Taiwanese wife, and the comparative accessibility of Taiwan's healthcare system. A's pathway was distinct from both: it was neither relational nor health-driven but circumstantially redirected. His intended next step had been higher education study in Europe; pandemic restrictions made this impossible, and Taiwan emerged as a viable substitute through the convergence of three factors: the relative social functioning of Taiwan during the early pandemic period, the Employment Gold Card scheme accessible online, and the presence of a trusted mentor in town. He described Taiwan as a destination shaped by structural circumstance rather than active preference, summarised in his own formulation as the only option available.



What differentiated A analytically from Z and F is the absence of relational embeddedness at arrival: where Z brought family roots and F a Taiwanese spouse, A arrived with a single mentorship connection and no broader social anchor. This had direct consequences for settlement trajectory. Z and F remained in Taiwan with meaningful relational infrastructure in place; A oriented toward departure from early in his residence, describing his situation through the Cantonese term “倒數”, a countdown to leaving. None of the three migrated as political refugees, yet all found themselves embedded in a political context that shaped their legal status, their relationship with the broader Hong Kong immigrant community in Taiwan, and the emotional landscape of their settlement experience. Non-political migration motivation does not produce apolitical settlement when the origin is post-2019 Hong Kong.

These five pathway types are not merely biographical variations, they represent structurally distinct conditions of entry that generated different temporal patterns of vulnerability and resource activation in the post-migration period. Threshold migrants entered with decisiveness but often without occupational or social preparation, making legal and credential structures immediately consequential. Accumulation migrants carried years of chronic political and vocational stress into the migration context before institutional pressures of visa status and credential recognition began, compounding rather than initiating distress. The planned migrant's trajectory illustrates a paradox in

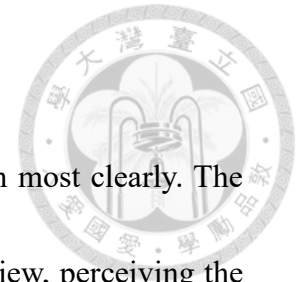


which acute symptoms emerged after the external threat had passed, once enforced isolation removed the forward-directed coping that goal planning had sustained. Mixed-motive migration produced ambivalence around political identity that intersected with professional positioning in the Taiwan institutional context. Circumstantial migrants, lacking both political urgency and relational preparation, faced formal legal infrastructure without the social and normative recognition needed to convert legal residence into felt settlement. These differences shaped not only how distress first emerged but when, through what mechanisms, and what protective conditions were available at the point of arrival. Pathway type thus provides the entry point for understanding how legal, occupational, social, and cultural determinants operated differently across cases, as examined in Themes 2 and 3.

1b. Trauma Dormancy, Reactivation, Political Vigilance, and Moral Powerlessness

Politically rooted distress in the migration context took forms that should not be conflated. Three analytically distinct mechanisms are distinguished here: (1) ongoing or reactivated trauma, in which the psychological effects of pre-migration political exposure continued to manifest in bodily, emotional, or behavioural form; (2) political vigilance, in which self-monitoring habits developed under authoritarian conditions persisted into a safer environment; and (3) moral powerlessness, in which helplessness toward political events not personally experienced as direct trauma generated bitterness,

guilt, and a need for meaning-making.



Participant D's account illustrated ongoing trauma and reactivation most clearly. The involuntary sensory recall she described during the research interview, perceiving the smell of tear gas when discussing the 2019 protests, indicated that her embodied exposure to political violence had not been resolved by geographic displacement. This kind of somatic intrusion in a reflective, safe research setting was not an emotionally prompted recollection but a physiological response outside her deliberate control. Alongside this trauma, however, D's post-migration trajectory showed meaningful stabilization. Her partner's prior presence in Taiwan provided an immediate relational anchor. Active engagement with the Hong Kong and Macau student association at her university created a sense of community and shared political reference. Volunteering with civil society organisations offered civic participation that was otherwise legally restricted. Her university's normalisation of psychological support as self-care rather than illness shifted her understanding of help-seeking, even though she did not access counselling herself. D's case illustrated that embodied political trauma and post-migration stabilisation can coexist, and that institutional messaging, alongside relational and community conditions, can moderate distress trajectories without direct service engagement.

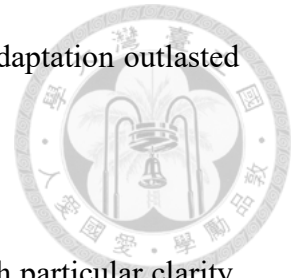
Participant B exhibited a pattern of dormancy and contextual reactivation. Panic



episodes emerged not during the most acute period of political stress in Hong Kong but in the migration context, specifically when his wife was absent from Taiwan for work. The combination of relational separation with news-triggered political memory reactivated distress that the urgency of the residency application process had partially managed. Participant G's acute psychiatric symptoms during the quarantine period upon arrival demonstrated a related structure of delayed onset: symptoms became acute in the relative safety and enforced isolation of quarantine, after the period of most intense external threat had passed. His subsequent recovery over several years, under different social and professional conditions, established that the delayed onset was associated with the specific circumstances of quarantine rather than an intractable clinical condition.

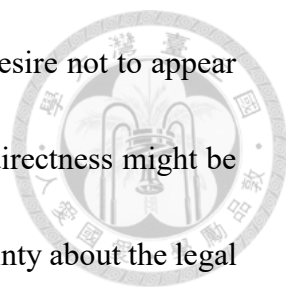
Political vigilance, distinct from acute trauma, operated as a habituated cognitive posture that persisted into Taiwan's comparatively open environment without serving a comparable protective function there. E described the self-monitoring practices she had internalised during her education-sector work under the National Security Law , scrutinising examples, phrasing, and choices for potential political interpretations, continuing in Taiwan where the immediate legal threat did not apply. B described ongoing constraints on the political content of his creative work, driven by concern for family members on the mainland whose safety he felt might be affected by explicit

political critique in his artistic output. In each case, the cognitive adaptation outlasted the specific threat environment that had produced it.



Participant F illustrated the mechanism of moral powerlessness with particular clarity, and it was important to distinguish this from political trauma. F did not report direct trauma responses arising from the 2019 movement: no sensory intrusions, panic episodes, or habituated self-monitoring. His political affect took a different form: bitterness toward what had happened to Hong Kong, a sense of helplessness about events he could not influence, and what he characterised as a form of survivor's guilt toward those who remained imprisoned or constrained. Rather than becoming psychologically destabilised by these feelings, F redirected them into self-development: reading, exercise, volunteering, and a forward orientation toward future contribution. This mechanism of moral powerlessness transformed through meaning-making was analytically distinct from both the trauma and vigilance patterns observed elsewhere in the dataset. Participant C exhibited a related but cognitively framed version: he processed geopolitical anxiety about cross-strait tension through an eschatological lens provided by his faith, which afforded a structured perspective on political uncertainty that produced emotional distance rather than avoidance.

The data also suggested that self-monitoring did not operate solely as a residue of Hong Kong's political threat environment. In Taiwan, some participants described adjusting



their speech and expression in response to different concerns: the desire not to appear blunt or culturally inappropriate, awareness of how Hong Konger directness might be received by Taiwanese interlocutors, and, in some accounts, uncertainty about the legal and residency implications of certain forms of political expression during the period before permanent residency was secured. This adaptation-driven self-editing shared the structural form of political vigilance, in that it involved the repeated internal screening of speech before expression, but it was oriented toward social acceptance and legal security in the host society rather than toward an authoritarian threat in the origin context. Whether the two forms operated independently or reinforced each other, producing a compounded communicative caution that drew on both motivations simultaneously, is a question that the cross-sectional design of this study cannot resolve but that future research with a longitudinal dimension could usefully examine.

Superordinate Theme 2: Institutional Precarity and Protective

Infrastructure Shape Vulnerability

The structural conditions governing participants' presence in Taiwan (their legal status, occupational options, access to healthcare, and available social support) functioned not merely as background context but as active determinants of mental health vulnerability and resilience. This superordinate theme examines these structural conditions in two

directions: the sources of institutional precarity, including visa-linked constraints, credential non-recognition, and administrative uncertainty; and the protective infrastructure that, when present, mitigated these vulnerabilities, including general healthcare, social support, and, with significant caveats, mental health services.

2a. Visa Status, Residency Uncertainty, Credential Recognition, Employer Dependency, and Occupational Reset

The nine participants entered Taiwan through distinct legal pathways, each carrying its own structure of precarity. Participant A's high-skilled professional visa offered autonomy across employment contexts (he was not restricted to a single employer), but this formal flexibility did not produce institutional trust or professional accountability within his working environment. Participant B arrived under a dependent residency category linked to his wife's Hong Kong-specific professional visa. This pathway was structurally different from Taiwanese-spouse dependency routes: it did not embed him in a Taiwanese family network and carried different levels of legal security, local institutional recognition, and settlement infrastructure.

Beyond structural precarity, B's case illustrated how administrative opacity generated sustained psychological distress. The prolonged residency application process involved repeated submissions against opaque, shifting criteria. When B's wife raised concerns, an immigration official responded dismissively: “if you're like this, go back to Hong

Kong”², reflecting broader patterns of official disrespect toward Hong Kong immigrants. The financial requirements also shifted unexpectedly. B faced a requirement to demonstrate an exceptionally high asset threshold of 6.5 million, challenging for a family that had lived in Taiwan for a few years. He mobilized borrowed funds from personal networks and carefully monitored exchange rates to maintain the required amount in his account. He later described this period as 'very depressing' (好抑鬱), ranking it among his most significant Taiwan experiences. Following residency approval, B experienced panic attacks when his wife was absent, suggesting physiological stress from the prolonged uncertainty persisted beyond resolution.

Participant H obtained employer-linked work residency after completing her tertiary studies in Taiwan, but this made her right to remain contingent on maintaining her current employment. She described her situation as working primarily to maintain her legal status rather than pursuing work of her own choosing, a structural entrapment in which adverse conditions could not be escaped without risking loss of residency.

Participant A's credential recognition was formally possible under his employment gold card scheme, yet his actual economic situation remained precarious. His hourly

² *Original [Cantonese]:* '你咁嘅話翻去香港算啦'

coaching rate of NTD 600 to 800 per hour generated monthly income estimated below NTD 20,000, substantially lower than his Hong Kong earnings, with no employment security or benefits. While his gold card permitted greater employment flexibility than standard work visas, this formal autonomy existed within a context of limited local demand for his specialised expertise and systemic low-wage hourly employment. Whereas Participant B's occupational reset involved rebuilding professional standing within a credential-gated field, A's precarity operated through hourly-wage labour markets: formally included through his professional visa, structurally vulnerable through wage precarity.

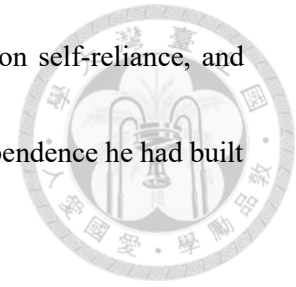
Participant G, transitioning from a student visa to work residency after graduation, described the cascading contingencies of this process in terms that conveyed both systemic clarity and personal dread.

Translation: *"If I could not find work, I would need to extend the visa; extending the visa means I cannot work; not working means no living expenses; no living expenses means relying on my family; if my family cannot support me, I cannot stay in Taiwan and there might be a consequence."*³

This formulation maps a chain of structural dependencies in which each contingency generates the next, and the entire cascade is triggered by the absence of employment. The mechanism is

³ **Original [Cantonese]:** 「我搵唔到工, 即係要 extend 簽證。我 Extend 簽證我就唔可以打工, 唔可以打工就有生活費, 冇生活費嘅話, 我就要同屋企人捱。然後佢哋唔幫我捱嘅話咁, 我點留嚟臺灣? 留唔到嚟臺灣就要翻香港。我翻香港嘅話就會點點點點。」

not only financial but identity-threatening: G's self-conception centred on self-reliance, and dependence on family support was experienced as a violation of the independence he had built since arriving in Taiwan.



Participant D's application process illustrated how political background interacted with administrative processing. Her prior professional background attracted additional scrutiny that delayed the approval of her residency documentation. She described this as contextually understandable, but the experience of having her professional history treated as a potential risk indicator added an administrative dimension to the political weight she was already carrying. D also encountered a constraint on her post-migration civic aspirations: she had hoped to work within an NGO or civil society organisation in Taiwan but found this path legally restricted by her status as a foreign national. She volunteered with a civil society body as a partial substitute, but described the constraint as frustrating, finding that democratic refuge did not, in practice, permit full civic or professional participation.

Beyond visa status, several participants experienced what might be described as an occupational reset: the non-transfer of professional experience and credentials from Hong Kong to the Taiwanese institutional context. Participant B's established his arts career in Hong Kong carried no institutional weight in Taiwan's arts sector, where established seniority structures governed recognition and access. He described the

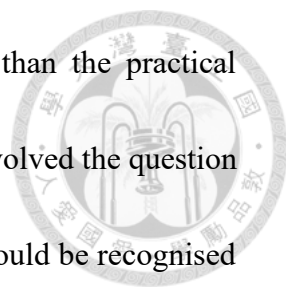
process of rebuilding professional standing from a much lower starting point than he had occupied before migration. Participant E's situation illustrated a more systemic form of credential non-recognition: her qualifications were inapplicable in Taiwan's education system, while the National Security Law simultaneously made re-entry into Hong Kong's education sector professionally dangerous. This double closure produced a vocational displacement that was both structurally imposed and psychologically significant.

Participant A's situation illustrated a formally distinct experience. His credentials were recognised and his visa permitted professional practice. However, the professional environment he encountered involved practitioners with fraudulent or expired credentials continuing to teach, resulting in student injuries, and his attempts to raise these concerns were suppressed. His credentials gave him the right to practise but not the institutional conditions in which professional standards could be maintained or enforced. A characterised this experience through a formulation he used to describe his overall experience of Taiwan: apparent freedom and equality masking actual discrimination.

The exceptions to the pattern of credential non-recognition were analytically significant. Z's specialised creative-sector skill set was locally valued and did not depend heavily on formal credential recognition; government-supported digitisation of arts content

during the pandemic created commissions that established his professional identity in the Taiwan market. G, working in performance-based human resources, found that measurable output determined advancement rather than formal qualifications. These exceptions indicated that occupational reset was most severe in credential-gated fields and most readily circumvented where performance was directly observable or where the immigrant's skills were locally rare and sought.

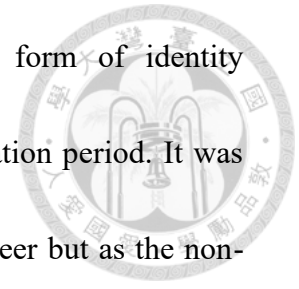
Across all these accounts of legal status, occupational pathways, and economic conditions, participants experienced a generalised ambiguity in how their legal and political identities were institutionally recognised. The absence of a coherent, publicly communicated framework for Hong Kong immigrants—whether arriving under employment schemes, professional visas, or dependent residency categories—was not experienced as explicit exclusion but as persistent institutional vagueness. Information was inconsistent, requirements were subject to change without notification, and no single governmental body held clear responsibility for their affairs. This institutional opacity operated across all categories: it delayed B's residency approval through shifting criteria and undisclosed decision-making; it prevented A from understanding what his professional integration actually required; it trapped H within a single employer through unclear rules about alternative pathways. The vagueness itself became a form of structural vulnerability distinct from explicit discrimination.



Across A, B, E, and Z, occupational adaptation involved more than the practical challenges of employment access or income maintenance. It also involved the question of whether professional identities built in Hong Kong or overseas could be recognised as legitimate within Taiwanese institutional and professional contexts. A's credentials and high-skilled professional visa gave him formal entry into professional practice, but not the institutional authority to enforce professional standards, nor the trust of the environment in which he worked. B's accumulated experience in the different facets of arts carried limited institutional weight within local seniority structures that privileged established practitioners regardless of external achievement. E's professional identity was doubly foreclosed: Hong Kong's political transformation made re-entry into her profession there professionally dangerous, while Taiwan's credential system did not recognise her qualifications. Z's comparatively smoother occupational path was partly conditional on possessing a specialised creative-sector skill set that was locally valued and less dependent on credential-gated recognition, and his case clarified the mechanism by contrast: where skills could be demonstrated and valued independently of institutional history, occupational reset was less total.

These cases suggest that occupational reset operated not only at the economic level of income and employment stability, but also at the level of professional selfhood. The inability to exercise professional standards, apply accumulated expertise, or gain

institutional recognition for prior achievements represented a form of identity disruption that compounded the structural difficulties of the migration period. It was experienced not only as the practical challenge of rebuilding a career but as the non-recognition of who participants understood themselves professionally to be.



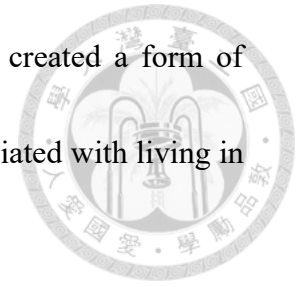
2b. Healthcare Access, Social Support, and Help-Seeking as Protective Infrastructure

Where Subordinate Theme 2a examined sources of structural vulnerability, this section examines sources of structural protection. Three forms of protective infrastructure are discussed in turn: general healthcare access and quality, social support networks, and mental health help-seeking. The third requires careful treatment, as the barriers to accessing mental health services for this population were significant and varied, and patterns of help-seeking and non-engagement require disaggregation rather than generalisation.

General Healthcare as Protective Infrastructure

Taiwan's general healthcare system emerged as a consistent and reliable protective factor across multiple participants. Its significance as a mental health determinant extended beyond service access: the affordability of treatment, the responsiveness of

clinical staff, and the efficiency of diagnostic processes together created a form of institutional trust and bodily security that reduced the anxiety associated with living in a new country with pre-existing or ongoing health needs.



Participant F's case illustrates this mechanism most fully. His primary post-migration stressor was illness relapse rather than migration or political experience. The affordability of treatment under National Health Insurance, once the initial waiting period had passed during which he self-funded care, substantially reduced the financial dimension of his medical anxiety. One detail complicated F's waiting period experience. His physician had advised that costs incurred before NHI coverage activated could be retrospectively reimbursed once eligibility was confirmed; this proved incorrect. F attributed the misinformation to the physician's unfamiliarity with immigrant-specific NHI administrative arrangements rather than to negligence.

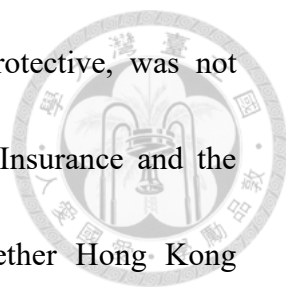
The episode introduced a layer of financial uncertainty that the system's structural protections did not prevent, even as F's overall assessment of Taiwan's healthcare remained positive. He described the nursing care he received in Taiwan as markedly more attentive than equivalent care he had experienced elsewhere, attributing this to more favourable patient-to-nurse ratios and a broader scope of nursing responsibility. Taiwanese physicians, he noted, spent more time with individual patients. Together, these qualities of the care experience restored a sense of bodily security that the illness

had disrupted, and created an institutional relationship of trust that supported his overall psychological stability.



Participant Z described a significant diagnostic and treatment process in Taiwan involving a health condition, managed through National Health Insurance with out-of-pocket costs that were a small fraction of equivalent care at a Hong Kong public hospital. He described the process as thorough, efficient, and emotionally responsive, providing both clinical confidence and a sense that Taiwan's institutional care was genuinely accessible and functional.

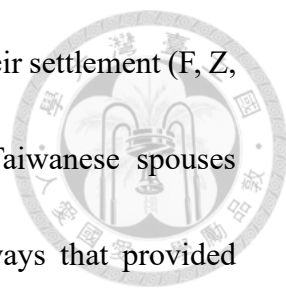
Participant D offered a positive assessment of Taiwan's healthcare accessibility more broadly, noting the absence of referral barriers, low costs, and efficient specialist consultations, a contrast with her experience of Hong Kong's more pressurised public health environment. Participant H held a broadly positive view of general healthcare in Taiwan, while noting that language remained a constraint in clinical contexts: she found it difficult to convey nuanced physical or emotional states in Mandarin, a limitation she managed through practical communication rather than formal interpretation. Participant A held positive views of Taiwan's Western medical system but described the Mandarin-only environment as a persistent limitation for Cantonese-speaking patients navigating healthcare.



F's account showed that healthcare access, while structurally protective, was not emotionally uncomplicated. His appreciation of National Health Insurance and the quality of care he received coexisted with concern about whether Hong Kong immigrants might be viewed by Taiwanese locals as competing for collectively funded healthcare resources. He was aware that this perception might exist even if it was not openly expressed, and this awareness introduced a social anxiety alongside the material relief that affordable care otherwise provided. This concern did not negate the protective function of the National Health Insurance system: the reduction in medical and financial anxiety that F described was real and significant. However, it introduced a social legitimacy dimension to the experience of healthcare access, suggesting that structural access to welfare infrastructure does not automatically confer a sense of full social entitlement. The question of whether migrants are perceived as legitimate users of collectively funded resources can coexist with, and partially complicate, the security that such access otherwise provides.

Social Support as Protective Infrastructure

Social support took diverse forms across the nine participants, and its protective function depended not simply on its existence but on its quality, reciprocity, and capacity to provide local incorporation alongside emotional sustenance.



Participants whose Taiwanese partners or spouses were central to their settlement (F, Z, H, and D) illustrate the nuance required here. For F and Z, Taiwanese spouses embedded them in local family networks and in social life in ways that provided practical anchoring, emotional reciprocity, and genuine local incorporation. F's wife and in-laws facilitated accommodation, healthcare navigation, and daily social life. Z's wife's family provided a relational base in southern Taiwan and continuity of domestic structure through the migration transition. For D, her partner's prior presence in Taiwan was the primary driver of her choice of destination and remained her central source of daily support after arrival. H's Taiwanese boyfriend provided essential daily emotional support and practical accompaniment, including accompanying her to a psychiatric clinic during an acute period of workplace-related distress.

However, spousal support was not uniformly protective: for B, whose wife periodically returned to Hong Kong for work, the temporary absence of his primary support person combined with structural vulnerability to trigger significant anxiety. The protective function of spousal and partner support was most robust when the relationship was mutually reciprocal, practically embedded in local life, and not subject to prolonged separation.

Faith communities provided a consistent protective structure for B, C, and F. C's Christian community in Taiwan simultaneously constituted a social network, a source

of meaning-making in response to political loss, and a context for practical mutual support. F's international congregation provided social connection beyond the family and opportunities for volunteer contribution that generated a sense of purposeful agency.

Faith, and where relevant personal spiritual practice more broadly, functioned as a coping resource that operated independently of formal institutional support for A and B as well.

Peer and student networks provided protection for D and G through different mechanisms. D's engagement with the Hong Kong student association at her university created community, shared political reference, and a space in which her identity and experience required no translation. G, who deliberately avoided the Hong Kong and Macau student community, which he perceived as maintaining a dismissive attitude toward Taiwan as a destination, built his support network through friendships with international students from Southeast Asian countries whose goals and orientation toward long-term settlement in Taiwan he found more compatible with his own. Both strategies generated forms of belonging, but through structurally different community choices.

B found protective community through unexpected channels: the New Residents Empowerment Centre, where a pastry-making course brought him into contact with fellow Hong Kong immigrants awaiting residency approval. The shared circumstance

of administrative uncertainty, encountered in a practical and non-clinical setting, generated a form of peer solidarity that B described as psychologically meaningful. Z maintained professional and neighbourhood relationships in southern Taiwan that provided daily social continuity. Volunteer work, reading groups, and structured contribution served F as a form of social participation and meaning-making that sustained his psychological engagement with life in Taiwan without depending on the Hong Kong immigrant community network.

Across the dataset, formal government-organised immigrant support channels offered markedly less protection than the informal ties described above. Participant B, whose settlement involved the most sustained engagement with Taiwan's immigration administration, described government-organised immigrant groups associated with the Mainland Affairs Council as offering little practical assistance during the period of greatest difficulty. His actual support came through a theatre practitioner's personal introduction, a New Residents Empowerment Centre cooking course, a neighbourhood card game shop, and community college courses, all informal, practically oriented, and community-embedded. This contrast reveals a gap not only in what formal channels provided but in how visible and accessible they were. Support organisations existed in principle but were insufficiently promoted and poorly integrated with the networks through which participants actually navigated settlement. For most participants,

institutional support was not experienced as actively withheld but simply as absent, whether unknown, untrusted, or unable to address their specific circumstances.



University Affiliation as Temporary Protective Infrastructure

The student pathway generated not only a legal route into Taiwan but, for some participants, a temporary institutional infrastructure that supported psychological wellbeing in ways unavailable to working-age immigrants outside university settings.

For Participant D, university affiliation provided more than academic standing. Her institution actively promoted counselling as a form of self-care rather than illness response, a messaging stance that shifted her understanding of psychological support and reduced the clinical threshold that help-seeking might otherwise have required. The Hong Kong and Macau student association at her university created a community with shared political reference, making it possible for D to occupy a social environment in which her background required no translation or defence.

Participant G accessed psychiatric clinic services and counselling during his most acute period of distress and described the follow-up support from a faculty member as meaningful to his subsequent stabilisation. These examples illustrate that for education-pathway participants, the university environment could function as a temporary

protective infrastructure. Counselling promotion, student associations, faculty relationships, and referral pathways collectively made psychological resources more visible and less stigmatised than they were in the working-age immigrant context.

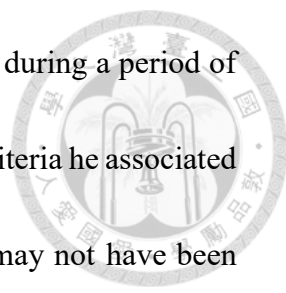


This protection was, however, time-limited and unevenly distributed. It weakened after graduation, when participants entered the student-to-worker transition and faced the pressures of job-seeking, work-permit applications, and, in H's case, employer-linked residency. The institutional support structures available within university settings had no equivalent in the post-graduation context. This asymmetry is analytically significant: the participants who had access to the most explicit mental health protective infrastructure were precisely those whose legal status was most temporary, and their vulnerability intensified at the moment that infrastructure was withdrawn.

Mental Healthcare: Barriers and Uneven Access

Mental health service access was significantly more uneven than general healthcare access and requires careful disaggregation. Participants' barriers and approaches to formal help-seeking reflected distinct mechanisms rather than a common pattern.

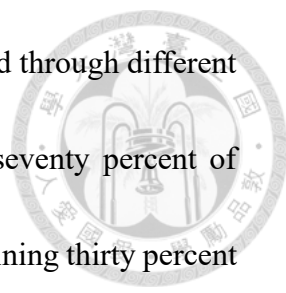
Participant B described the most analytically distinctive barrier in the dataset. A fellow immigrant advised him that a formal mental health record might be interpreted as evidence of psychiatric problems during his residency application and could jeopardise



his status. B accepted this advice and chose not to seek formal help during a period of significant distress, despite recognising that his circumstances met criteria he associated with professional intervention. He later reflected that the concern may not have been grounded in actual policy, but in a context of administrative opacity and high personal stakes, the uncertainty was sufficient to deter engagement. This mechanism, in which immigration-related concerns deterred mental health help-seeking during periods of acute need, appeared under-documented in the literature reviewed for this thesis. It illustrates how immigration policy and mental healthcare access interact in ways that are not easily visible from either a policy or a clinical perspective.

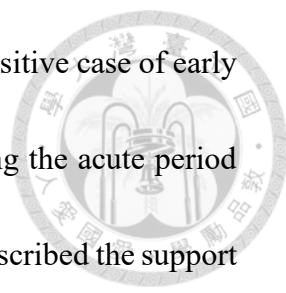
Participant A's non-engagement reflected distrust of data privacy practices and professional ethical standards in the Taiwanese mental health sector, consistent with his broader experience of professional non-accountability in his own field. His wellbeing was managed through mentorship, physical training, and faith practice , a purposive self-management approach rather than avoidant non-help-seeking. Participant F described no perceived need for formal mental health services. His wellbeing was supported through exercise, trusted relationships, faith community engagement, reading, and volunteering , a functional self-management approach sustained by adequate protective infrastructure.

Participants H and E both identified language as a significant and persistent barrier to



effective therapeutic engagement. Both estimated, independently and through different framings, that Mandarin allowed them to convey approximately seventy percent of what they needed to communicate in therapeutic contexts. The remaining thirty percent was precisely the domain of emotional nuance, culturally specific experience, and the affective textures of lived reality that Mandarin could not carry. For H, this shortfall meant that therapeutic conversations remained at a surface level relative to her actual experience. For E, the barrier was compounded by a dual cultural gap: therapists in Taiwan were unfamiliar with Hong Kong's sociopolitical context, while therapists in Hong Kong she also consulted were unfamiliar with the specific difficulties of living in Taiwan. Neither setting could hold both dimensions of her experience simultaneously. E additionally described an encounter with a therapeutic approach that she found harmful or actively mismatched, which further undermined her engagement with formal support.

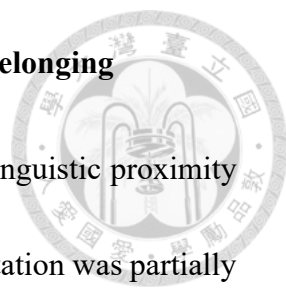
Participant D represented a positive case of institutional conditions enabling help-seeking. Her university actively promoted counselling as a form of self-care rather than a marker of serious illness, which shifted her understanding of psychological support. Having normalised distress as a collective experience during the 2019 movement and not sought help at the time, D came to view counselling in Taiwan as a legitimate resource and supportive. The institutional messaging around mental health, not just the



service itself, was the enabling factor. Participant G represented a positive case of early psychiatric and counselling access. He engaged with services during the acute period of his quarantine difficulties and through his initial university, and described the support as meaningful, particularly from a faculty member who provided consistent follow-up. His case illustrated that barriers to mental health service engagement were not universal features of Taiwan's mental healthcare system but were shaped by participant-specific configurations of language, legal status, cultural fit, and relational context.

A gendered pattern in formal help-seeking was observed within this sample: the two women participants (E, and H) each accessed counselling or psychiatric services, while most of the male participants did not do so during periods of greatest distress. This pattern should not be read as evidence that women were more distressed or that male non-engagement reflects greater resilience. Rather, it suggests that gender may have shaped both exposure to certain relational stressors and the perceived availability or acceptability of formal support. B's decision was shaped by immigration-status concerns, A's by professional ethics distrust, F's by self-management sufficiency, Z's by temperament and adequate informal support. These were not inherently gendered barriers, but they were configured differently from the barriers encountered by the women participants, and understanding that difference is analytically important.

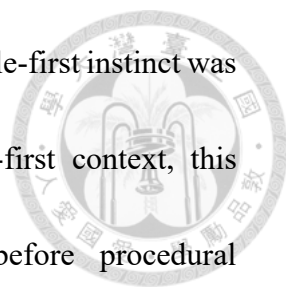
Superordinate Theme 3: Cultural Adaptation and Incomplete Belonging



A pervasive expectation among participants was that cultural and linguistic proximity between Hong Kong and Taiwan would ease adaptation. This expectation was partially borne out but also generated its own difficulties: shared script created an illusion of communicative equivalence that concealed differences in interactional norms, emotional register, and social logic, making cultural friction harder to attribute to difference and more readily experienced as personal inadequacy. Participant E, in attempting to account for the systematic quality of these frictions, developed an interpretive framework contrasting two logics: qing-li-fa (情理法), the relational-first orientation she associated with Taiwan, in which feeling precedes reasoning and procedure ; and fa-li-qing (法理情), the rule-first orientation she associated with Hong Kong, in which procedure comes first and emotional accommodation last. Derived from her own experience rather than standing as an objective characterisation of either context, the framework provides an explanatory structure applicable across all three subordinate themes: communicative mismatches in 3a, hierarchical authority and its social costs in 3b, and differentially achieved senses of belonging in 3c.

3a. Language, Emotional Expression, Cantonese Recognition, and Belonging

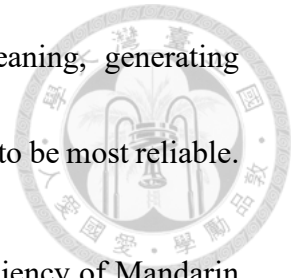
The relational-first interactional logic introduced above generated specific and recurring communicative failures for participants in concrete institutional encounters.



When E faced an urgent academic matter requiring escalation, her rule-first instinct was to approach the responsible authority directly. In the relational-first context, this bypassed the emotional and relational deference expected before procedural engagement and was read as inappropriate. The same action carried entirely different social meanings within each cultural logic, and E experienced the resulting misunderstanding as interpersonal failure rather than normative incompatibility. Participant H described a sustained experience of relational anxiety arising from a different feature of the same framework: Taiwanese colleagues and peers tended to signal reluctance through ambiguous affirmation rather than direct refusal, and she found herself unable to read these signals reliably, generating ongoing uncertainty about whether interactions had concluded satisfactorily. What was legible as polite avoidance within the relational-first framework was experienced as unintelligible and disorienting by someone habituated to more direct refusal.

A specific and recurrent instance of semantic mismatch emerged around the Mandarin phrase “還好”. Both B and E independently described misunderstanding its valence in Taiwan: where a cognate expression in Hong Kong Cantonese usage is broadly positive or neutral, 還好 in Taiwanese Mandarin typically conveys that something is barely acceptable or mediocre. B described a practical misunderstanding arising from this gap in a landlord interaction. The significance of this example lies less in the incident itself

than in what it illustrated: shared script conceals divergent meaning, generating misunderstanding precisely where shared understanding is assumed to be most reliable.



A more fundamental issue than semantic mismatch was the insufficiency of Mandarin as an emotional register for participants whose primary language was Cantonese.

Participant H described a specific affective function that Cantonese served but Mandarin could not replicate:

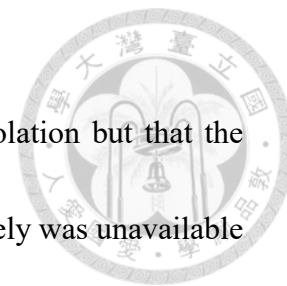
Translation: *"When I am angry I tend to reach for Cantonese profanity: it releases the anger and expresses the rage more fully. With the Taiwanese equivalent, after you say it the feeling is still there. It does not discharge as well."*⁴

Participant E identified the same gap at the level of evaluative vocabulary, specifically in attempting to convey the Cantonese terms 戇鳩 and kamL and their distinction from the Taiwanese 白目, with direct consequences for therapeutic communication:

Translation: *"There are words I do not know how to express precisely in Mandarin. KamL, for instance: I genuinely do not know how to convey kamL. Coming to Taiwan I learned that 戇鳩 is supposedly equivalent to 白目, but real 戇鳩 differs from 白目. I do not know how to convey what it is to face someone who is truly 戇鳩, to release the emotion of dealing with a 戇鳩 person. And when you tell your counsellor, they cannot grasp the difference between facing someone 戇鳩 and facing someone kamL. There is a language*

⁴ **Original [Cantonese]:** “其實都係，即係嘅時候我都傾向講香港嘅粗口，比較可以抒發到個怒氣，會比較可以表達到個嘅。台灣嗰種講完道氣仲係度，抒發得無咁好。”

barrier there."⁵⁶

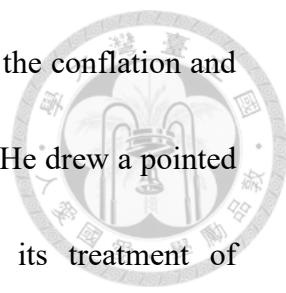


E's point was not that individual words were untranslatable in isolation but that the affective world required to describe and process experience accurately was unavailable in Mandarin. H and E independently arrived at the same estimate: roughly seventy percent of what they needed to communicate in therapeutic contexts could be conveyed in Mandarin, while the remaining thirty percent, covering anger's discharge and the texture of social wrongness, could not. Mandarin-medium therapy accordingly felt like emotional truncation, functional at the surface but unable to reach the felt quality of the experience being processed. That the two reached similar estimates independently suggests the Cantonese communication gap was a shared service-access issue rather than an individual proficiency limitation, though the small sample cannot establish its prevalence.

Distinct from the capacity issue was a mechanism of Cantonese erasure in Taiwanese public life, identified by Participant A. He described being instructed, in a public context, to speak Chinese, a directive that implicitly equated Chinese with Mandarin.

⁵ **Original [Cantonese]:** “有啲字我唔知點樣可以用國語表達得精準啲。例如 kaml，我真係唔知點樣可以表達 kaml。我嚟到台灣先知原來“戇鳩”係傳說中嘅“白目”，但真正嘅“戇鳩”好似又同“白目”係有分別嘅。我唔知點樣可以表達佢真係一個戇鳩仔，去釋放你面對一個戇鳩仔嘅 emotion。但你同個心理諮詢師講嘅時候佢又 get 唔到你面對個戇鳩仔同個 kamL 個分別，係有個 language barrier 喺度囉。”

⁶ 戇鳩 is a Cantonese vulgar term for someone whose recklessness or social obliviousness causes harm; it carries stronger and more specific affective loading than the Taiwanese Mandarin 白目 (literally, white-eyed; colloquially, socially oblivious or inappropriate). Kaml is Hong Kong internet slang describing behaviour that is cringe-worthy, awkward, or difficult to categorise, producing a distinctive reaction of social discomfort that resists precise naming.



His response was to switch to English, a deliberate act that refused the conflation and asserted his status as an outsider rather than a non-compliant local. He drew a pointed contrast between Taiwan's stated multicultural orientation and its treatment of Cantonese speakers in public space. This erasure was not about communicative competency: A was fully capable of communicating in Mandarin, but about recognition: whether Cantonese was acknowledged as a legitimate linguistic and cultural variety in Taiwan's public sphere. The mechanism of erasure operated as a form of social exclusion that was analytically independent of the seventy-percent communicative limit described by E and H and analytically independent of the semantic mismatch described above. Together, these three mechanisms (insufficient emotional register, linguistic erasure, and semantic mismatch) constituted a cumulative argument that Cantonese loss in Taiwan was not only a communication barrier but a loss of emotional precision, cultural recognition, and identity legitimacy.

Participant F's attendance at a Hong Kong memorial event in Taiwan alone, surrounded by other attendees who arrived in established groups, illustrated a further dimension: the unavailability of Hong Kong peer community for certain participants regardless of their structural stability. His wife, in-laws, and faith community provided important support, but none of these were Hong Kong relationships in the specific sense that shared political memory and shared cultural identity required. The absence was made

legible at precisely the moment when collective Hong Kong belonging was most visibly enacted around him.



Together, the mechanisms examined in this subsection constitute a cumulative argument about the nature of cultural integration for this cohort. Communicative sufficiency in Mandarin was not equivalent to cultural membership: semantic mismatch produced misunderstanding precisely where shared script suggested shared meaning; insufficient emotional register produced truncation at the level of affective experience most relevant to mental health; and Cantonese erasure withdrew recognition of a linguistic and cultural identity that existed independent of communicative function. F's experience at the memorial event added a dimension that language competency could not address: the absence of a specifically Hong Kong peer community in which shared political memory could be activated. These findings together point to a structural gap between the communicative and the cultural: language acquisition and functional adaptation can proceed to a workable level without producing the recognition, emotional precision, and collective belonging that participants identified as most significant to their wellbeing in Taiwan.

3b. Hierarchy Culture, Gendered Vulnerability, and the Cost of Correction

A cluster of experiences across multiple participants pointed to hierarchy as a significant cultural mechanism shaping daily experience in Taiwanese institutional and

professional life. Where the relational-first framework examined in 3a manifested primarily as communicative mismatch, in the cases examined here it governed more fundamental questions of authority: who had the standing to speak, correct, challenge, or refuse, and what the social cost of doing so would be. This hierarchy involved differential authority, the deference owed to seniority, and the social penalty attached to correction and challenge. In several cases, gendered power asymmetries intersected with hierarchical structures to compound distress. Participants were not adapting to a different communication style but to a different set of rules governing legitimate speech and its consequences.

Participant B described a feature of Taiwan's arts sector he characterised as “老師文化”, teacher culture: a hierarchical orientation in which established senior practitioners held authority maintained through deference and not open to challenge through peer-level critical exchange.

In B's experience of Hong Kong's arts environment, critical dialogue across levels of seniority was practised and expected. In Taiwan, the authority structure of teacher culture resisted this: challenging established figures was socially costly, and open exchange was subordinated to hierarchical deference. B's professional standing from Hong Kong carried no weight within this framework, and his expectations of collaborative exchange went unmet.

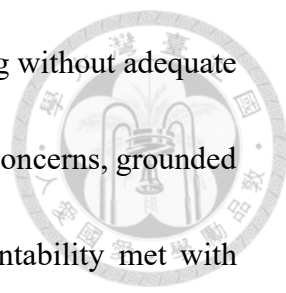
Participant Z, who held an educational role within his professional field, observed similar hierarchy from an insider position. He characterised it as deeply and intractably entrenched, and noted that Taiwan's universities retained a degree of hierarchical pedagogy that Hong Kong universities had largely moved beyond.

***Translation:** "Some of them are younger than me, or around the same age. Why are you so rigid? How can you teach students this way? Even those who studied abroad come back exactly the same. So I feel that this teacher culture is deeply entrenched in them, and it leaves students afraid to say anything at all."*⁷

The developmental harm he identified was specific: traditional teachers dictating the terms of students' thinking and action produced graduates who lacked the confidence or the habit of self-initiated inquiry. The culture was, in his account, self-reproducing, with teachers formed within it teaching the same way regardless of subsequent experience, including time spent studying abroad. Z responded through his own pedagogy, asking students to use his name rather than the title 老師 (teacher) and framing his role as sharing experience rather than transmitting authority. This counter-strategy was possible because his institutional standing gave him the social capital to contest the norm from within. B, without equivalent institutional footing, could not alter what he encountered.

Participant A's experience brought the hierarchy's resistance to correction into sharper

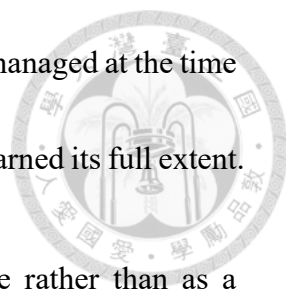
⁷ **Original [Cantonese]:** 佢同我年紀可能細過我，或者差唔多，但點解你咁古板呢？即係你教學生嗰陣時候會咁樣㗎呢？Even 佢喺外國讀書，翻都係咁樣。噃咁，所以覺得呢個老師文化嘅根深蒂固喺佢哋嗰度，咁令到嗰啲學生係唔夠膽 say 一啲嘢出嚟。



relief. In his professional field, he encountered practitioners teaching without adequate credentials, resulting in student injuries. His attempts to raise these concerns, grounded in professional standards and a procedural commitment to accountability met with institutional silence and suppression. The professional norm he encountered was one in which correction was itself the violation, regardless of its professional justification. The cost was borne entirely by the corrector: A was professionally isolated, institutionally unsupported, and socially penalised for prioritising professional standards over relational deference. This was a direct contributor to his progressive disillusionment with Taiwan and his definitive plan to leave.

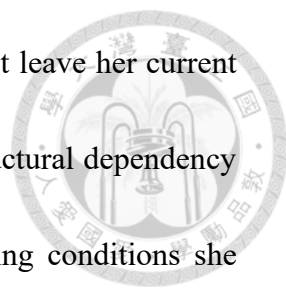
Participants E and H, whose communicative experiences in 3a illustrated the social costs of normative mismatch, encountered hierarchy as a further and independent mechanism of difficulty within their academic programmes. Both women were older than the majority of their classmates, occupying ambiguous positions in the senior-junior structure of their programmes: too old to be straightforwardly junior in terms of life experience, but without the institutional seniority that would have conferred formal authority. E described being read by some peers as “好蝦”, a Cantonese expression for someone easy to take advantage of or unlikely to retaliate, and experiencing a pattern of exclusionary behaviour that she interpreted as the deliberate assertion of dominance by peers who recognised her relative social vulnerability. H described mockery by

younger classmates about her accent in her early studies, which she managed at the time with self-deprecating humour but found distressing when she later learned its full extent.



Gender functioned as a vulnerability-modifying factor in E's case rather than as a standalone determinant, and it intensified through interaction with hierarchy culture, communication barriers, and inadequate institutional response. E described objectification by senior students, intrusive professional enquiries about her marital status and fertility intentions, and an incident of unwanted physical contact that was subsequently minimised by a third party who characterised it as an expression of interest. She reported the incident through available institutional channels, but the follow-up was inadequate. The mechanism here was not only harassment but a structural pattern in which the relational-first cultural framework made direct refusal and formal complaint legible as social aggression from a junior woman directed at a senior man, inverting the power dynamic in the institutional narrative. The rule-first expectation that a clear refusal and a formal report would produce institutional response was not met, because the institutional framework prioritised relational repair over procedural accountability. This interaction between gendered power, institutional culture, and cross-cultural communication failure intensified E's distress beyond what any single factor alone could account for.

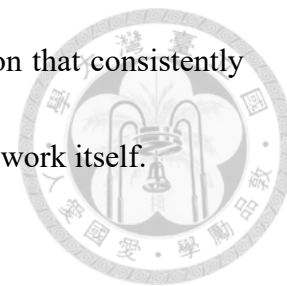
H's workplace situation involved a different configuration of structural and relational



difficulty. Her employer-linked work residency meant she could not leave her current employment without losing her right to remain in Taiwan. This structural dependency created conditions in which adverse workplace dynamics, including conditions she found distressing or constraining, could not be escaped without legal and financial consequences that were prohibitive given her limited income. The convergence of economic precarity, restricted mobility, and the necessity of maintaining a specific employment relationship created a form of structural entrapment in which normal channels of recourse (seeking other work, negotiating different terms) were foreclosed. Whether this produced emotional manipulation in a clinical sense is not supported by the available evidence; what is clearly documented is that the structural trap itself was a significant and ongoing source of distress.

Across these cases, hierarchy operated as a multiplier of existing vulnerability rather than as a standalone mechanism of difficulty. For B, it withdrew professional standing and foreclosed collaborative exchange; for A, it converted a procedural obligation into a social violation and rendered professional accountability structurally impossible; for E, it intersected with gendered power to make both refusal and formal complaint legible as aggression from a junior woman toward a senior man; for H, it converted an employment relationship into structural dependency from which normal channels of recourse were foreclosed. The common pattern was the relational-first framework's

insistence on preserving existing authority structures, a preservation that consistently placed the cost of deviation on participants rather than on the framework itself.



3c. Identity and Settlement Orientation

Participants' relationships to Taiwan as a place of residence, cultural attachment, and long-term home ranged across a wide spectrum and were, in most cases, dynamic rather than fixed. The overarching analytical finding of this subordinate theme is that legal incorporation can stabilize material life without transforming cultural identity, and that the two can diverge substantially in either direction.

Participant A occupied one end of the settlement spectrum. He described his orientation toward Taiwan through the Cantonese term “倒數” (countdown), indicating active preparation for departure after completing his higher education programme. His disillusionment was not episodic but progressive: a clarified recognition that the terms of continued residence required compromises in professional ethics and normative recognition that he was unwilling to accept. He described Taiwan as a transitional stage, a structural circumstance that had served a function at a particular moment, rather than a home. His identity remained multilayered and firmly located in a Hong Kong and internationally inflected self-conception. He explicitly rejected identification as Taiwanese regardless of future residency status.

Participant H occupied a position of conditional and provisional presence. She consistently described herself as a Hong Konger currently residing in Taiwan, with the qualifier "currently" carrying a psychological weight distinct from simply "living." The formulation marked Taiwan as a site of occupancy rather than settlement, and her presence there as functional rather than chosen in any deep sense. Her identity was rooted in Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong, and she valued this rootedness: Cantonese was not only a language but the primary vehicle of her cultural identity and emotional world. The absence of the social and linguistic environment that had sustained this identity was experienced as loss.

Participant F presented a case of formal legal incorporation without cultural identity transformation. Holding Taiwanese citizenship, he nevertheless consistently described himself as a Hong Kong person living in Taiwan. Citizenship provided legal stability, access to full healthcare, and practical security, but it did not produce a felt sense of Taiwanese cultural membership. His Hong Kong identity remained the primary register within which he understood himself, his values, and his relationships. F's case provides direct evidence for the analytical argument that legal incorporation and cultural belonging are separable: formal status can be acquired and even advanced without the cultural dimension following.

Participant B had undergone a transformation in settlement orientation following a

prolonged residency application process and its eventual positive resolution. He framed the experience of earning residency as constitutive of his claim to Taiwanese identity.

Translation: *"I spent [a prolonged period] proving myself; if I am not Taiwanese, then what am I?"*⁸

B expressed this statement with physical emphasis during the interview, a claim to Taiwanese identity grounded in earned belonging through institutional ordeal rather than in origin or cultural affinity. The prolonged residency was not merely a bureaucratic experience but a constitutive narrative of membership.

B also articulated a dual identity that held Hong Kong and Taiwan simultaneously.

Translation: *"Where are you from? Taiwan. What kind of person are you? A Hong Konger."*⁹

The formulation distinguished residence from cultural identity as two questions requiring genuinely different answers as a matter of precision. The dual identity this expressed was settled rather than transitional.

Participant Z's trajectory illustrated a non-deliberate pathway to civic identification. He described the experience of following Taiwan's national baseball team as producing a form of collective belonging previously unavailable to him: an identification with a shared public entity that was entirely organic, emerging through sustained immersion

⁸ **Original [Cantonese]:** 「我搞咗 00 年去 prove 自己，我唔係臺灣人咁我係咩？」 *Note: the duration reference has been generalised in the translation for anonymisation purposes.*

⁹ **Original [Cantonese]:** 「邊度嚟？台灣嚟。咩人？香港人。」

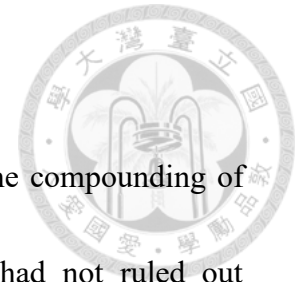
in local life rather than through deliberate integration effort or political commitment.

He noted that Hong Kongers had traditionally lacked a strong national identity with which to identify, making this form of civic belonging a genuinely novel experience.

Z's case suggested that organic civic identification could develop through sustained social and cultural immersion in ways that were not available through deliberate strategy or institutional pathway, and that it might be more available to participants whose migration was not defined by political urgency and who had the structural stability (family network, professional continuity, established local relationships) to allow for it.

C's settlement orientation was conditionally but positively disposed: Taiwan had become home in a practical and emotional sense over several years of residence, supported by his faith community and forward-looking professional plans. He described no intention to return to Hong Kong unless the political situation fundamentally changed, and encouraged other Hong Kong immigrants to engage broadly with Taiwanese society rather than remaining within Hong Kong social circles. Participants D and F held comparable conditional orientations, both remaining open to return under specified political conditions but regarding Taiwan as their current and foreseeable home. G was building a Taiwan-oriented identity through professional achievement and social integration, with a diminishing connection to a Hong Kong

identity he described as having been weak even before migration.



E's settlement orientation was genuinely ambivalent, shaped by the compounding of difficulties described across all three subordinate themes. She had not ruled out returning to Hong Kong or moving to a third destination, and described her commitment to completing her studies in Taiwan as provisional. Her assessment of Taiwan as a migration destination, offered as advice to those considering the same path, distinguished sharply between the experience of visiting and the experience of living and working there, finding the gap between the two greater than she had anticipated and difficult to reconcile with the expectations created by cultural proximity.

The dominant mode of belonging across this cohort was not settled integration, conditional acceptance, or definitive departure, but a liminal posture characterised by legal presence without full cultural commitment, political safety without full civic participation, and cultural proximity without cultural recognition. Participants occupied a jurisdiction that had not fully decided how to categorise their presence, within a cultural environment that welcomed them in some registers and excluded them in others, having departed a home that was no longer safe and having not yet arrived, if arrival is possible, at a home that was fully secured.

Summary of Key Analytical Findings



Cross-case analysis across three superordinate themes produced a consistent core finding: mental health vulnerability among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan did not arise from any single source but was a product of political displacement, legal precarity, occupational disruption, and cultural friction in specific configurations. Conversely, stability emerged not from the absence of difficulty but from protective configurations like secure or workable legal status, accessible healthcare, relational anchoring, and a future-oriented sense of identity that interrupted or mediated these converging pressures.

Two findings warrant particular emphasis as points of departure for the Discussion. First, legal incorporation and cultural belonging emerged as analytically separable: advancing in formal status did not produce proportional gains in cultural recognition or felt belonging. Second, formal institutional support was largely not reaching those who needed it most, whether because it was inaccessible, unknown, or perceived as ineffective. Informal community ties and peer networks filled this gap instead. The Discussion examines the structural and political conditions behind both findings, their implications for policy and service design, and what they contribute to existing frameworks on migration and mental health.

V. Discussion



1. Overview of Argument and Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter makes three arguments. First, mental health vulnerability among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan was structurally produced. It did not arise from political trauma, migration stress, or cultural difference alone [25]. Vulnerability emerged when these forces converged in configurations shaped by immigration pathway, legal status, occupational conditions, and the presence or absence of support [4].

Second, cultural proximity between Hong Kong and Taiwan is not simply a protective factor. It generates a distinctive form of adaptation difficulty that the existing acculturation literature does not adequately theorise. When two societies appear similar on the surface, the friction that nevertheless exists between them is harder to attribute to genuine structural divergence and more readily experienced as personal failure. Several participants described not a sense of encountering a foreign culture but a sense of failing to manage a familiar one. That distinction matters for how adaptation difficulty is understood, attributed, and supported.

Third, administrative opacity functions as a health determinant not only by causing direct psychological stress but by shaping whether people seek help at all. This study

identifies a specific and under-documented mechanism: uncertainty surrounding residency assessment criteria deterred at least one participant from seeking mental health support during a period of acute distress. The act of help-seeking itself became a calculable risk to legal status. This mechanism sits at the intersection of immigration administration and public health and has not received proportionate attention in the migration mental health literature.

These three arguments are developed through two complementary theoretical frameworks: the social determinants of health model [9, 14, 44], which situated individual health outcomes within layered structural conditions and the political determinants of health framework, which extended this analysis by identifying political structures, governance decisions [8, 14] as upstream forces that shape those conditions. Applied together to this dataset, these frameworks explain why vulnerability was neither uniformly distributed nor individually determined. The sections that follow trace the mechanisms through which political, structural, cultural, linguistic, and institutional conditions combined to shape mental health outcomes, engage the existing literature, draw cross-participant comparisons, and develop recommendations grounded in the findings.

Underlying these three arguments is a specific characterisation of the population. Following Ho and Fung [18], this cohort is understood as reluctant migrants, occupying

a position between forced and voluntary migration, whose departure was driven by the anticipated erosion of an accustomed way of life rather than by direct persecution. This positioning is theoretically consequential because it locates the population's mental health outcomes within a migration that was neither a clean escape nor a freely chosen relocation, and because it frames two conditions that distinguish Taiwan from other destinations for post-2019 Hong Kong emigrants.

The first is a cultural-similarity expectation gap. The assumption of cultural proximity generated an anticipation of easy belonging that the friction of settlement then contradicted, so that difficulty was experienced as personal failure rather than structural divergence, a mechanism developed in Section 5. The second is Taiwan's cross-strait geopolitical position, which operated simultaneously as a personal source of secondary displacement anxiety and as the structural cause of the constitutional ambiguity governing Hong Kong residents, developed in Section 4. Taken together, these two distinctivenesses constitute the study's central theoretical contribution. They specify why findings drawn from Hong Kong emigrants in Western democracies cannot be transferred directly to the Taiwan context, and why cultural proximity and geopolitical entanglement must be theorised as determinants in their own right rather than treated as background conditions.

2. Political Displacement Before and After Migration

The study positioned the 2019 anti-extradition movement and the subsequent National Security Law not as the sole or direct cause of individual mental health outcomes but as a cumulative risk factor that elevated the baseline vulnerability of participants before migration and continued to interact with post-migration stressors. Ni et al's [2] prospective cohort study established that rates of PTSD and depression during the 2019 movement were comparable to those documented in populations experiencing armed conflict, meaning this cohort arrived carrying an elevated risk profile that the healthy migrant assumption does not account for

Five analytically distinct forms of movement-related psychological burden were identified across the dataset. Acute political trauma and post-migration reactivation were most clearly present in Participants B, D, and G. D had directly witnessed political violence and retained involuntary sensory recall that re-emerged during the research interview. G's acute psychiatric symptoms emerged not during the period of political stress in Hong Kong but during quarantine after arrival in Taiwan, a pattern of delayed onset consistent with the literature on how safety, rather than ongoing threat, can precipitate the expression of suppressed trauma responses. B exhibited dormancy followed by contextual reactivation: panic episodes emerged in Taiwan during politically sensitive periods when relational separation coincided with movement-

related news exposure, not during the acute period of political stress before migration.

Participant E's sustained self-censorship in her previous professional role under National Security Law conditions constituted a form of occupational moral injury. It gradually eroded her professional integrity without producing the intrusive symptoms associated with acute trauma, distinguishing cumulative occupational injury from event-based traumatic reactivation. Collective grief and the loss of Hong Kong as a shared civic home generated affective burden across multiple participants without reaching a clinical threshold. Political vigilance, the cognitive habit of monitoring speech and expression for potential threat, was identified in B and E, both of whom described communicative caution that had outlasted the specific threat environment that produced it.

Moral powerlessness and survivor's guilt constituted a fifth mechanism, in which helplessness toward uncontrollable political events was redirected into purposeful meaning-making rather than psychological destabilization. F redirected these feelings into self-development, producing a trajectory of stability through purposeful meaning-making.

Participant Z described the news coverage and collective atmosphere in Hong Kong during this period as emotionally heavy. He did not describe depressive symptoms as a

personal psychological state, and his migration decision was primarily shaped by his child's developmental and educational needs and by existing family connections to Taiwan. Accurately characterising Z's account requires distinguishing between a participant's description of an external atmosphere as depressing and a participant's report of personal mental health symptoms: the two are analytically and clinically distinct.

These forms of burden were not sequential. Pre-migration trauma, ongoing political vigilance, and moral powerlessness intersected with post-migration structural stressors rather than preceding them in a linear timeline. The resulting configurations were compound and mutually reinforcing, and this intersection is one of the principal reasons why the healthy migrant assumption fails for this cohort.

3. Migration Pathway as Upstream Structural Determinant

The social determinants of health framework positions legal status, occupational conditions, and access to services as structural determinants that operate upstream of individual health outcomes [45]. The present findings demonstrated that the specific legal pathway through which a participant entered Taiwan functioned as precisely such a determinant, producing distinct vulnerability configurations independent of individual characteristics or pre-migration burden.

The Taiwanese-spouse route embedded participants in local family networks and, for F, eventual citizenship meant a level of institutional anchoring unavailable to other pathways. The contrast with B clarified the mechanism: his residency was anchored to his wife's Hong Kong-category visa rather than a Taiwanese family network, meaning that having a partner in Taiwan and having a Taiwanese partner produced markedly different structural conditions.

For participants on the student pathway, University affiliation created not only a legal route but a temporary protective infrastructure that comprised counselling access, mental health normalisation messaging, student associations, and referral pathways, which were unavailable to working-age immigrants outside university settings.

This protection was time-limited. It weakened after graduation, when participants entered the student-to-worker transition. Prior to the 2026 legislative reform, Hong Kong and Macau graduates faced a shorter job-seeking period than graduates from other overseas Chinese backgrounds or international student categories [23]. This differential reflected the distinct administrative framework governing Hong Kong and Macau residents under the Laws and Regulations Regarding Hong Kong and Macao, administered by the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) rather than the National Development Council (NDC), which operates with an explicit economic talent-attraction mandate. The MAC framework required balancing economic considerations

against political risk and cross-strait stability assessments, producing a more restrictive default for Hong Kong and Macau residents. The 2026 alignment of Hong Kong and Macau graduates with other groups represented policy lag: institutional recognition arriving after the present study's cohort had already borne the cost.

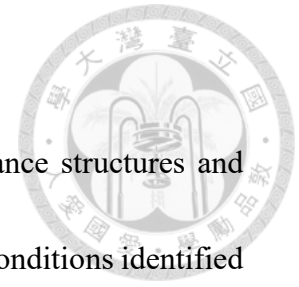


Employer-tied work residency produced the most precarious post-study configuration, foreclosing exit options that would normally have been available and converting adverse workplace conditions into sources of structural entrapment [24].

The professional visa gave Participant A formal autonomy but not institutional trust. His credentials permitted practice, but they did not guarantee the conditions in which professional standards could be maintained. Visa categories designed to attract skilled labour do not ensure the environment in which that labour can be exercised with integrity.

The investment pathway was not represented in the dataset. Within the idiographic design of this study, recurring patterns were sufficiently developed for the student pathway and Taiwanese-spouse route to support mechanism-level comparison. However, no claim of thematic sufficiency can be made for the investment route, and participants on that route may face a structurally distinct set of conditions whose mental health implications this study cannot address.

4. Constitutional Ambiguity and Political Determinants



The political determinants of health framework positions governance structures and political power as determinants that operate upstream of the social conditions identified in the Dahlgren and Whitehead model [36]. This framework is particularly apt for the present population because the administrative difficulties participants described were not incidental features of an otherwise coherent system. They reflected a fundamental constitutional ambiguity in Taiwan's governance of Hong Kong and Macau residents that had never been legislatively resolved.

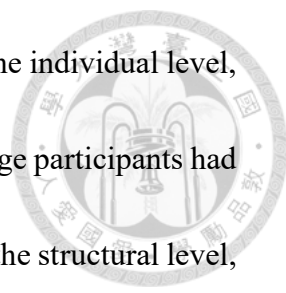
Thought process

Taiwan's Constitutional Court Interpretation No. 328 declined to define the boundaries of national territory, treating the matter as a major political question beyond judicial determination [20]. This absence of a definitive constitutional demarcation forms part of the broader legal indeterminacy surrounding how Hong Kong and Macau residents are categorized. Under the Hong Kong and Macao Relations Act they are classified as a distinct category, neither formally foreign nationals nor domestic residents [22]. The absence of a coherent, publicly communicated administrative framework was not experienced by participants as explicit exclusion but as persistent institutional vagueness: requirements were inconsistently communicated, responsible bodies were unclear, and information was subject to change without accessible notification. This

vagueness was structurally generated by the absence of a single body holding clear administrative responsibility for Hong Kong immigrants' affairs.



Triangulating evidence for this systemic opacity was produced through the researcher's own institutional encounter. A formal written request to the National Immigration Agency (NIA, reference M1150201022) for demographic data on Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan by category, gender, and year from 2019 onwards was submitted with National Taiwan University affiliation and institutional review board approval. The written reply redirected the researcher to publicly available open data already found insufficient. A follow-up telephone enquiry concluded with a referral to an official at the Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior, who confirmed he could not release data without a formal referral from the NIA that had not been provided. A written enquiry to the Mainland Affairs Council produced a reply indicating the request fell outside its jurisdiction. The result was a closed loop of institutional deflection: each body was apparently responsive but collectively generated no actionable output. This encounter occurred despite formal academic credentials, institutional review board approval, and a stated public health purpose. The administrative opacity that participants described as individual migrants was therefore verifiable as a systemic feature of the institutional environment, not a subjective perception shaped by bureaucratic unfamiliarity.



Cross-strait geopolitical tension operated as a dual determinant. At the individual level, it functioned as a source of secondary displacement anxiety: the refugee participants had sought in Taiwan was itself subject to existential precariousness. At the structural level, cross-strait tension was the political condition that produced Taiwan's constitutional ambiguity and the administrative caution that governed MAC policy toward Hong Kong and Macau residents. The dual function of geopolitical tension, operating as both a personal psychological stressor and a structural cause of the institutional conditions participants found most difficult, distinguishes the Taiwan context from other documented destinations for Hong Kong immigrants, where the relevant political determinants operated through different mechanisms.

5. Cultural Proximity, Hierarchy, and Professional Recognition

Existing acculturation frameworks, most systematically developed by Berry [12], predict that cultural and linguistic similarity between origin and host contexts will reduce the psychological burden of acculturation and facilitate integration. The present findings complicate this prediction in a way that constitutes a distinct theoretical contribution. Cultural proximity between Hong Kong and Taiwan did not straightforwardly ease adaptation. In several cases it produced a specific and under-theorised form of difficulty. When two societies appear similar on the surface, the friction that nevertheless exists between them is harder to name and more readily

experienced as personal inadequacy than it would be in a culturally distant context [46].

Several participants described not a sense of encountering a foreign culture but a sense of failing to manage a familiar one. That distinction matters because it means the psychological cost of cultural friction may be higher, not lower, when the two societies appear similar.

Three mechanisms through which proximity created specific difficulty were identifiable across the dataset. The first was disappointed expectations. Many participants arrived with an imagined community of Taiwan constructed through political solidarity, media portrayals, and social networks. Taiwan was anticipated as a democratic refuge with cultural accessibility built in. [47]When institutional barriers, hierarchical norms, and communicative frictions became apparent, the gap between expectation and reality was experienced not merely as inconvenience but as a form of betrayal[18, 48]. This gap was sharpest for those whose imagined Taiwan was most specifically shaped by political solidarity rather than prior direct experience of living there.

The second mechanism was invisible friction. Shared script created an assumption of shared meaning that the data consistently contradicted. Participants B and E independently described misunderstanding the valence of the Mandarin phrase 還好, an error that illustrated a wider pattern: where surface similarity is assumed, divergence

goes unrecognised for longer and produces more confusion when it finally surfaces.

Participant E named this dynamic most precisely through the qing-li-fa and fa-li-qing contrast. In the relational-first logic she associated with her Taiwanese context, emotional and relational considerations take precedence over formal reasoning and procedural rules. In the rule-first logic she associated with Hong Kong, explicit rules and procedures come first, with emotional accommodation last. When E encountered an urgent academic matter and approached the responsible authority directly, her action was procedurally appropriate within her own framework and socially inappropriate within the framework of her institution. She experienced the resulting misunderstanding as interpersonal failure. The two frameworks were structurally different; the shared surface had made that difference invisible until the collision had already occurred.

The third mechanism was self-blame. When friction cannot be attributed to cultural difference because the two contexts appear similar, it tends to be attributed to the individual. E's account of experiencing her directness as a personal flaw rather than a normative divergence, and A's description of Taiwan as superficially free and equal but actually discriminatory, both reflect conditions in which the structural source of difficulty was present but not legible as such. The gap between what proximity promised and what participants actually encountered produced a form of distress that

was difficult to process because it had no obvious external cause.



Participant B's framework addressed a related dimension. He contrasted what he described as Hong Kong's outward-facing cultural formation with Taiwan's more internally bounded orientation. In his account, Hong Kong's historical development as a trading and migratory city produced a cultural orientation in which adaptability to outsiders was a necessary mode of survival, whereas Taiwan was experienced as more protective of its own norms and more likely to place the burden of adaptation on newcomers. When asked whether this affected his emotions, B connected it directly to teacher culture in the arts sector, describing his response as questioning why things could not be more open and, at certain points, feeling despair about whether he should continue in the field.

These participant-generated frameworks may be read alongside Hong Kong sociological accounts of generational change. The sociological literature on Hong Kong's post-baby-boom generations has suggested that successive cohorts developed stronger emphases on autonomy, self-realisation, civic participation, and the expectation of clearly defined rules and accountable institutions [49]. This study did not set out to test a generational theory, and the sample is too small to sustain generational claims. However, participants' repeated emphasis on procedural clarity, efficiency, professional integrity, and freedom of expression suggests that cultural

adaptation difficulties in Taiwan were not only about encountering unfamiliar customs. For some participants they involved the disruption of values regarded as central to Hong Kong identity and to their own sense of professional and civic agency. Institutional ambiguity, indirect communication, and the suppression of professional accountability were not merely inconvenient. They were affectively stressful because they violated expectations of clarity, procedural definition, and accountable administration.

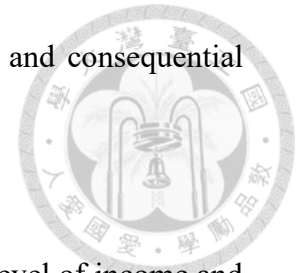
Hierarchy culture emerged as the cross-domain mechanism through which these orientations produced friction. In arts institutions, professional practice environments, academic programmes, and gendered interpersonal encounters, participants encountered differential authority, expected deference toward seniority, and significant social costs for correction and challenge. B's characterisation of teacher culture named a professional hierarchy that resisted open critical dialogue regardless of practitioners' external credentials. A encountered an environment in which pointing out others' mistakes was treated as a social violation regardless of professional justification, producing isolation rather than institutional response. A described his overall experience of Taiwan through a formulation that captures the mechanism precisely.

Translation: "On the surface, free and equal, but in reality, full of discrimination."¹⁰

This recognition gap, in which formal inclusion coexisted with the systematic non-

¹⁰ **Original [Cantonese]:** 「表面上自由平等咯，但系實際上充滿歧視咯」

recognition of professional standards and identity, was a specific and consequential form of acculturation stress.



Across A, B, E, and Z, occupational reset operated not only at the level of income and employment but at the level of professional selfhood, the non-recognition of identities built over years of practice before migration.

Participants' responses to cultural difference varied not simply by individual disposition but by the structural conditions surrounding them. Participants with stronger legal stability, relational anchoring, professional continuity, or healthcare security could approach cultural difference as interesting, negotiable, or ordinary. Participants C, B, and F each demonstrated equanimity in the face of cultural divergence. Participants whose cultural difference was encountered through institutional dependency, professional invalidation, gendered vulnerability, or weak support were more likely to experience it as misrecognition or threat. E's distress arose not from cultural difference in isolation but from its intersection with academic hierarchy, gendered harassment, inadequate institutional response, and communicative constraint. A's disillusionment was inseparable from the professional non-accountability he encountered. Adaptation capacity was therefore structurally mediated rather than purely individual, and this structural mediation must inform how clinical and policy responses to acculturation difficulty are designed.

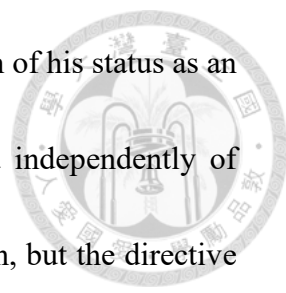
6. Language, Cantonese, and the Three-Layer Service Gap



The analysis of language in relation to mental health requires engagement at a level beyond communicative competence. Cantonese functioned for this population not only as a medium of daily communication but as a medium of emotional precision, cultural memory, identity recognition, and social inclusion. Its absence from mental health service provision therefore represented not only a linguistic barrier but a form of incomplete recognition, in which the language through which participants most fully experienced and processed their inner lives was not available in the therapeutic context.

The convergence of H's and E's accounts suggests that the Cantonese communication gap extended beyond an individual proficiency issue, although this small sample cannot establish its prevalence within the wider population. Their experiences are consistent with evidence that emotional processing in a non-dominant language can produce qualitatively different affective contact [50, 51]. Mandarin-medium therapy was experienced as emotional truncation: adequate at a functional surface level but unable to reach the felt quality of the experience being processed.

Cantonese also functioned as a dimension of identity and social belonging. Participant A described being instructed in a public context to speak Chinese, a directive that implicitly equated Chinese with Mandarin and rendered Cantonese invisible as a legitimate linguistic variety in Taiwan's public sphere. His response was to switch to



English, a deliberate refusal to accept the conflation and an assertion of his status as an outsider rather than a non-compliant local. This erasure operated independently of communicative competence: A was fully capable of using Mandarin, but the directive was experienced as a refusal to recognise Cantonese as a legitimate form of Chinese. Participants' sustained identification as Hong Kongers, maintained even by those who had acquired Taiwanese citizenship or long-term legal status, was inseparable from their identification with Cantonese as a cultural and identity-bearing language. The absence of Cantonese in mental health service provision was therefore not only a practical access problem but a form of institutional non-recognition of who participants were [13, 52]. Three layers of service gap were identified. The first was the Cantonese-language provision gap. No centralised, publicly accessible directory of Cantonese-capable mental health providers was identified during the research period. Both E and H identified Cantonese-language mental health provision as the single most significant potential improvement to mental healthcare accessibility for this population. The second layer was the service visibility and referral gap. University-enrolled participants had institutional referral pathways; working-age immigrants outside the university setting had none. No coordinated outreach about available mental health resources for Hong Kong immigrants existed in accessible form. Access to whatever culturally or linguistically informed services did exist depended on informal networks and personal

contacts, and those most acutely in need were least positioned to navigate such routes.

The third layer was the Hong Kong sociopolitical trauma expertise gap. Peng [15]

documented Taiwan's limited institutional capacity for working with politically related

trauma, identifying this as a gap rooted in the relative recency of Taiwan's own

engagement with its martial law period and the underdevelopment of trauma-informed

frameworks adapted to its own history. The therapeutic frameworks developed in

Taiwan for political trauma were built around a historically concluded atrocity. Hong

Kong's political trauma is ongoing: the National Security Law remains in force,

surveillance continues, and the political situation that generated participants' distress

has not resolved. The phenomenology of ongoing political harm is clinically distinct

from the processing of concluded historical violence. Participant E described a

therapeutic encounter she found not merely unhelpful but actively harmful, a finding

consistent with research on culturally mismatched therapeutic relationships and their

potential to compound rather than alleviate distress [15].

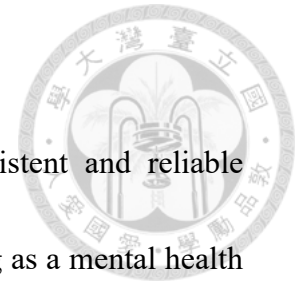
Together, these three layers constituted a cumulative insufficiency in mental healthcare

provision for this population. The term insufficiency is used deliberately: it describes a

documented structural gap rather than a categorical judgment on Taiwan's mental

healthcare system as a whole [53].

7. Taiwan's Healthcare System as a Protective Factor



Taiwan's National Health Insurance system emerged as a consistent and reliable protective structural factor across multiple participants, functioning as a mental health determinant through mechanisms that extend beyond access to medical services.

Existing research on Hong Kong immigrants to the United Kingdom documented healthcare access and cost as significant stressors in the settlement experience [1]. The British National (Overseas) pathway subjects immigrants to a waiting period before National Health Service entitlement and exposes them, in the interim, to private healthcare costs in a high-cost system. NHI eligibility and enrolment timing varied according to employment and residence status: participants with a fixed employer were enrolled from their first day of employment, whereas those without qualifying employment became eligible only after six months of continuous residence [54]. Despite these differing waiting periods, participants who obtained coverage consistently described the system as affordable and protective, delivering care at a small fraction of the cost of equivalent treatment elsewhere.

Participant F's case illustrated most fully how general healthcare access operated as a mental health determinant. His primary post-migration stressor was illness relapse rather than migration adjustment or political experience. The affordability of treatment under National Health Insurance substantially reduced the financial dimension of his



medical anxiety. The attentiveness of nursing care, the physician time available to individual patients, and the responsiveness of the diagnostic process together created a form of bodily security: a confident sense that illness could be managed, that institutional care was accessible and competent, and that the physical self was not unprotected in an unfamiliar environment. Bodily security of this kind, and the institutional trust that sustained it, functioned as a mental health protective factor in ways not typically foregrounded in migration mental health literature, which tends to focus on psychological services, social support, and legal status rather than on the relationship between healthcare quality and psychological stability.

Participants Z and D extended the finding: Z described a significant health diagnostic process as thorough, efficient, and emotionally reassuring at a cost that was a small fraction of equivalent care elsewhere, and D offered a positive broader assessment of Taiwan's healthcare accessibility relative to Hong Kong's more pressurised public health environment.

F's account also introduced a complicating dimension that prevents the finding from being read as straightforwardly positive. His appreciation of National Health Insurance coexisted with concern about whether Hong Kong immigrants might be viewed by Taiwanese locals as competing for collectively funded healthcare resources. He was aware that this perception might exist even without being openly expressed, and the

awareness introduced a social anxiety alongside the material relief that affordable care otherwise provided. Access to healthcare reduced migrants' medical and financial insecurity, but it did not necessarily eliminate emotional tension. The sense of security created by healthcare access could be complicated by concerns over whether migrants were perceived as legitimate users of collectively funded welfare infrastructure [13].

Provider-level unfamiliarity with immigrant-specific NHI arrangements, as illustrated by the incorrect advice F received during the waiting period, represents a further gap between structural access and the experience of navigating the system in practice. This nuance does not diminish the finding that Taiwan's general healthcare system was a genuine protective factor. It does, however, caution against treating structural access as equivalent to full social entitlement.

The contrast between Taiwan's general healthcare provision and its mental healthcare provision for this population is among the study's most analytically distinctive findings. The same National Health Insurance infrastructure that produced reliable, affordable, and attentive general care was embedded in a system where mental healthcare for Hong Kong immigrants was characterised by the three-layer cumulative insufficiency described in the preceding section. General healthcare was protective; mental healthcare remained linguistically incomplete, institutionally invisible, and contextually undertrained.

8. Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Patterns

Help-seeking patterns across the nine participants were more varied and individually configured than a uniform structural account would suggest, as summarised in Table 6.

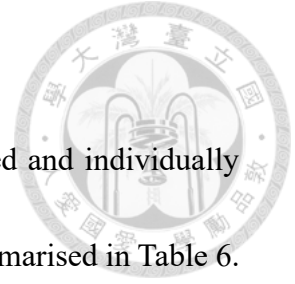
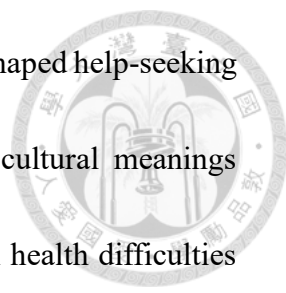


Table 6 Focused comparison of mental-health help-seeking pathways

Participant	Type of help sought	Main Facilitator or barrier	Experience or consequence
E	Formal mental-health treatment	Language and cultural mismatch	Mostly ineffective; one harmful encounter
G	Formal mental-health treatment	University access and faculty support	Positive and meaningful; contributed to stabilisation
H	Formal mental-health treatment	Acute workplace distress; Cantonese gap and private-service cost	Remained in treatment
C	General healthcare contact for stress	Recognised physical or stress-related symptoms, but did not proceed to psychological care	Continued self-management through activity, study and faith
D	Receptive but did not access	University messaging normalised counselling as self-care	Attitude became more receptive, although she managed without accessing services
B	Need or distress present but deterred	Fear that a mental-health record could affect residency	Managed significant distress through informal and community support
A	Need or distress present but deterred	Distrust of privacy, confidentiality and professional ethics	Relied on self-management and informal support
F	No perceived need	No perceived psychological need; strong protective infrastructure	Generally stable
Z	No perceived need	No acute perceived need; stable family and social support	Generally stable



An age-related help-seeking pattern was observed. Age might have shaped help-seeking not only through service awareness, but through the moral and cultural meanings attached to psychological distress. For younger participants, mental health difficulties were more readily interpreted through the language of stress, trauma, counselling, and professional support. For older participants, reluctance to seek help appeared more closely connected to stigma, distrust, self-reliance, or the belief that distress should be privately endured. This finding echoes Baral et al.'s discussion of a generational gap in mental health awareness, in which younger generations are described as having greater mental health literacy and more openness toward help-seeking, while older generations may carry stronger taboos and misconceptions around mental illness [55]. However, in this study, the generational pattern was further complicated by migration status and political distrust: older participants' reluctance was not only a matter of mental health stigma, but also reflected concerns about institutional trust, privacy, and the possible consequences of formal help-seeking in an uncertain immigration context.

Help-seeking barriers were individually configured rather than uniformly operative. A's distrust of healthcare privacy and confidentiality was specific to him and grounded in his direct professional experience of non-accountability in Taiwan's institutions; it was not echoed by other participants. B's residency concern arose from a particular piece of advice in a particular context and was not shared. F's non-engagement reflected

adequate self-management infrastructure rather than stigma or structural barrier. The finding that warranted population-level concern was the Cantonese-language provision gap and the absence of a visible service directory, both confirmed independently by multiple participants and applicable to any Cantonese-speaking immigrant attempting to access mental health support regardless of individual attitudes or legal status.

The data also suggested that self-monitoring continued after migration but changed form. The Analysis chapter distinguished politically driven self-censorship rooted in NSL-era threat from adaptation-driven self-editing oriented toward social acceptance and residency security in Taiwan. Some participants described screening their speech for concern about sounding blunt or culturally inappropriate, and some described heightened awareness of the potential implications of political expression before permanent residency was secured. Whether these two forms of self-monitoring reinforced each other or operated through distinct mechanisms is a question the cross-sectional design of this study cannot resolve, and one that a longitudinal design would be better placed to examine.

A gender pattern was observable within the sample. The two women participants, E and H, both accessed counselling or psychiatric services. Male participants did not do so during periods of greatest distress, though for reasons that were individually distinct and not systematically gendered. E and H encountered relationally and institutionally

generated stressors, including gendered harassment and employer-linked structural entrapment, that may have created different need thresholds. These observations suggest a potentially gendered pattern in the type of stressor encountered rather than in help-seeking propensity, though the sample is too small to support confident generalisations.

9. The Residency-Mental Health Access Intersection

One of this study's most analytically significant findings was that immigration-related concerns may deter mental health help-seeking during acute distress. This mechanism differed from other barriers discussed in this chapter. While language gaps, cultural mismatch, and service invisibility limit access to appropriate support, immigration-related fear operated earlier in the help-seeking process: it turned the decision to seek care into a perceived risk to legal status. This distinction is important for public health policy, as it cannot be resolved through service accessibility or cultural competence alone. It requires clarification and safeguards at the level of immigration administration.

Participant B received advice from a fellow immigrant that a formal mental health record could be interpreted as evidence of psychiatric problems during his residency application and might jeopardise his status. He declined to seek professional support during a period of significant distress, despite recognising that his circumstances warranted professional intervention. Whether the advice was legally accurate was less

relevant than its operational effect. In a context of administrative opacity, inconsistently available information, and high personal stakes, the uncertainty itself functioned as an effective deterrent.[17] Given what he did not know and could not verify, not seeking help was a reasonable response to genuine institutional uncertainty rather than an irrational fear.

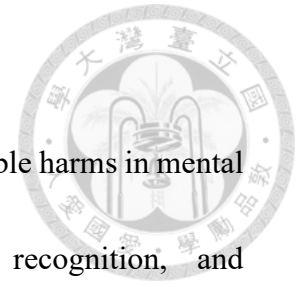
This mechanism is a downstream consequence of the constitutional ambiguity and administrative opacity described in Section 4. The closed loop of institutional deflection documented through the researcher's own administrative encounter created conditions in which accurate information about residency assessment criteria was structurally unavailable to participants[17, 56]. B could not verify whether a mental health record would affect his application because the system that would have provided that information was not designed to communicate it clearly [21]. His deterrence was therefore not an individual misunderstanding but a predictable outcome of systemic opacity.

The policy implication is direct. If mental health treatment records and also health records are not in practice considered in residency assessments, communicating this clearly and consistently through accessible Cantonese and Traditional Chinese channels would reduce the deterrence mechanism at low administrative cost [57]. The absence of this clarity is not a neutral gap. It produces the kind of deterrence B described,

concentrated at precisely the period of greatest vulnerability. The residency-mental health intersection also points to a broader design problem in Taiwan's administrative framework for this population: information that people need to make decisions about their own welfare is either unavailable or accessible only through informal networks that disadvantage those most in need.

The preceding sections have traced, through theoretical, structural, cultural, linguistic, and institutional dimensions, the mechanisms through which mental health vulnerability and resilience were produced among post-2019 Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan. Three arguments have been developed: that vulnerability was structurally configured rather than individually determined; that cultural proximity between Hong Kong and Taiwan generated a distinctive form of adaptation difficulty not captured in existing acculturation frameworks; and that administrative opacity functioned as a public health determinant by converting the act of help-seeking into a perceived threat to legal status. These findings carry concrete implications for government policy, university practice, healthcare provision, employment conditions, and community organisation, which the following chapter addresses in turn.

VI. Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion

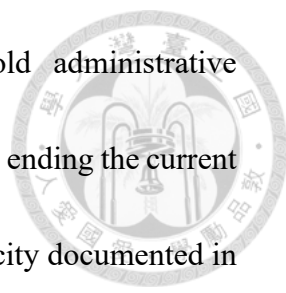


The evidence gathered through this study points to a set of preventable harms in mental healthcare access, immigration administration, professional recognition, and institutional design. This chapter translates the findings into recommendations across five stakeholder domains: government and immigration authorities, universities, healthcare and mental health providers, employers and professional institutions, and community organisations. Each recommendation is grounded directly in the mechanisms and conditions identified through the analysis. The chapter acknowledges the study's limitations, identifies directions for future research, and offers a concluding reflection on the study's contributions to the migration mental health literature.

1. Recommendations

1.1 Government and Immigration Authorities

It was found that constitutional ambiguity and administrative opacity produced chronic stress, deterred help-seeking, and prevented participants from accessing reliable information about their own rights and status. Residency uncertainty deterred at least one participant from seeking mental health support during acute distress, not because of individual misunderstanding, but because accurate information was structurally unavailable.



A single clearly identified body should be designated to hold administrative responsibility for Hong Kong and Macau residents' affairs in Taiwan, ending the current distribution across the NIA, MAC, and NDC that generated the opacity documented in this study. The government should publish explicit written clarification, in Cantonese and Traditional Chinese, on whether mental health treatment records are considered in residency assessments. If they are not, this should be communicated through channels accessible to people who are not already connected to institutional support networks. Employer-tied work residency conditions should be reformed to permit workers to change employers within agreed parameters without losing residency status, addressing the structural entrapment documented in Participant H's case. Clearer policy guidance on the job-seeking and work-permit transition for graduating Hong Kong and Macau students should be developed, reducing the cascading vulnerability Participant G described.

1.2 Universities

Finding addressed that university affiliation created temporary protective infrastructure for education-pathway participants, including counselling access, student associations, and mental health normalisation messaging. This infrastructure weakened at the point of graduation, precisely when structural vulnerability intensified.

Universities should maintain visible counselling promotion framed as self-care rather

than illness response[58], sustaining the normalisation effect documented in Participant D's case. Cantonese and English accessible mental health referral information should be provided at enrolment for Hong Kong students alongside Mandarin-medium services, reflecting the finding that Mandarin allows only partial emotional communication for many in this group. Hong Kong and Macau student associations should receive institutional recognition and support as a documented form of protective infrastructure. An explicit graduation transition package covering job-seeking timelines, work-permit processes, and post-graduation mental health referral pathways should be developed, closing the gap between the support available during enrolment and its absence afterwards.

1.3 Healthcare and Mental Health Providers

The three compounding layers of insufficiency characterised mental healthcare provision for this population: the Cantonese-language provision gap, the service visibility and referral gap, and the Hong Kong sociopolitical trauma expertise gap[27].

A participant who communicates fluently in daily Mandarin may be unable to access the full emotional register required for effective therapeutic work in that language.

The most immediately actionable recommendation is the development of a centralised, publicly accessible directory of Cantonese-capable mental health providers in Taiwan, maintained and communicated through channels that reach Hong Kong immigrants not

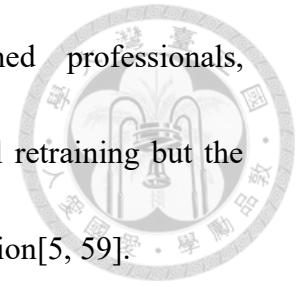
already connected to institutional networks. Training in Hong Kong's sociopolitical context and the specific phenomenology of National Security Law-era political trauma should be incorporated into professional development frameworks[15, 30]. Privacy and confidentiality protections should be clearly communicated to prospective clients, as distrust of data practices was identified as a specific deterrent to help-seeking in Participant A's case. Referral linkages between community organisations, universities, and mental health providers would create navigable pathways for those who currently depend on informal contacts that are unevenly distributed.

1.4 Employers and Professional Institutions

Employer-tied residency made it structurally impossible for Participant H to address adverse workplace conditions without risking her legal status. Professional non-recognition operated not only as economic disadvantage but as a form of identity disruption across multiple participants.

Independent, confidential grievance channels that operate outside employer control should be available to workers in employer-linked residency situations. Without such channels, adverse conditions cannot be reported without visa consequences, which is precisely the condition H described. Accessible information on residency and employment rights should be provided in language that Hong Kong workers can practically use. Professional institutions should develop guidance on credential

recognition and transition pathways for Hong Kong-trained professionals, acknowledging that occupational reset involves not only practical retraining but the non-recognition of professional identity accumulated before migration[5, 59].



1.5 Community Organisations and Peer Networks

Informal community ties, non-clinical practical settings, and peer networks provided more meaningful psychological support than formal government-organised immigrant channels, which were perceived as largely unhelpful or were simply unknown to those who needed them most. Those most acutely in need were least positioned to navigate existing routes.

Investment in non-clinical Cantonese peer support groups and structured peer networks for Hong Kong immigrants would provide accessible support for those outside university settings or without established social networks. These should be practically oriented and community-embedded, following the model of Participant B's New Residents Empowerment Centre experience rather than clinic-oriented formats. Organisations should actively reach people who are not already connected, as passive provision will not reach the most vulnerable. [29] Practical workshops on residency, healthcare access, job-seeking, and mental health literacy would address the information gap that contributed to several participants' distress. Community spaces should be designed so that participation does not require political disclosure, making

them accessible to participants who maintain political vigilance or prefer not to be publicly identified with a particular political position.



2. Limitations

Several limitations of the present study require acknowledgment. The most significant boundary concerned the sample's selection criteria: one prospective participant who arrived via political asylum route was excluded due to psychological instability at the time of recruitment. This exclusion was ethically necessary, but it illustrates a systematic challenge in trauma research: the most acutely affected individuals in traumatised populations are frequently ineligible for participation under the protocols designed to protect them. The present sample represents participants with sufficient psychological stability to engage in extended reflective interview. The severity of mental health burden in the broader post-2019 Hong Kong immigrant population may exceed what this study captured, and findings should be interpreted with this boundary clearly in mind.

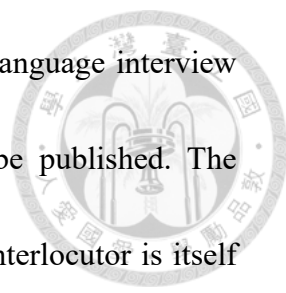
Within the idiographic IPA design, recurring patterns were sufficiently developed for the student pathway and the Taiwanese-spouse route to support mechanism-level comparison. The investment pathway was not represented in the dataset. No claim of thematic sufficiency can be made for that route, and participants on investment pathways may face a structurally distinct set of conditions whose mental health

implications this study cannot address. Participant Z's second-hand observations about acquaintances on investment routes are treated as a contextual indication of a research direction rather than primary evidence.



The compressed recruitment and interview phases, constrained by the thesis timeline, produced a sample whose size and diversity were limited relative to what a fully resourced study would have achieved. A larger and more systematically diversified sample would provide stronger grounds for cross-case comparison and more confident mechanism-level claims. The absence of mental health practitioner interviews, specifically Cantonese-speaking professionals with experience of this population, was both a methodological constraint and a confirmation of the service gap the study identified: such practitioners were not available to be recruited because the gap the study documents is real.

The cross-sectional design captured participants' situations at a specific point in time during a period of institutional and political flux. Several participants were at visible points of transition during interviews, and the trajectories developing at those points cannot be confirmed without longitudinal follow-up. No data are available on whether participants who were interested in or referred toward mental health services subsequently accessed them.



In several cases, participants disclosed material in the Cantonese-language interview context that they subsequently indicated they did not wish to be published. The willingness to disclose at length to a trusted Cantonese-speaking interlocutor is itself analytically significant, pointing to the population's unmet need for this kind of engaged, linguistically matched interaction. Managing the boundary between research participation and supported disclosure required ongoing reflexive attention. The researcher's own experience of self-monitoring during cultural adaptation and permanent residency application sensitised the analysis to participants' accounts of those processes while also requiring active bracketing to prevent projection of the researcher's own experience onto participant narratives.

All nine interviews exceeded the planned 60 to 90 minutes, running to approximately two to two and a half hours. This overrun itself reflected the scarcity of spaces where participants could speak freely in Cantonese with someone familiar with both the cultural and political context of their experience, which was precisely the gap this study documented in mental health service provision.

Finally, the study is limited in its capacity to quantify the availability of Cantonese-capable mental health services in Taiwan. No centralised data source for this was identified during the research period. This absence is analytically noted as part of the service visibility gap rather than treated as evidence that no such services exist.

3. Future Research Directions

Longitudinal follow-up with the present cohort would provide trajectory data unavailable from the cross-sectional design. Several participants were at points of clear transition during the interviews, and following them over subsequent years would produce evidence about how mental health outcomes, acculturation trajectories, and legal incorporation develop over time, and whether the protective and vulnerability factors identified here continue to operate or shift in relative importance.

Systematic research on Hong Kong immigrants who entered Taiwan through the investment pathway would address the gap in the dataset and test whether the mechanisms identified in this study operate differently when financial security reduces some structural vulnerabilities. The student-to-worker transition is a specifically risky period warranting dedicated research attention: a longitudinal or retrospective study focusing on this transition would produce evidence about how the shift from university-based protective infrastructure to working-age structural precarity affects mental health outcomes.

Research on the mental health consequences of employer-tied residency for Hong Kong immigrants in Taiwan would test whether the structural entrapment mechanism identified through H's case is more widespread and would contribute evidence relevant to policy reform. Mapping the availability and distribution of Cantonese-capable

mental health providers in Taiwan would convert the qualitative service gap identified in this study into a quantifiable structural finding. Alongside this, examining Hong Kong immigrants' actual use of psychological counselling and psychiatric services in Taiwan would provide population-level data to contextualise the mechanisms identified qualitatively here.

If and when Cantonese-capable mental health practitioners with experience of this population become more available in Taiwan, including them as research participants would provide essential provider perspectives unavailable to this study. A quantitative follow-up study with a larger sample would test whether the mechanisms identified through IPA are generalisable and would enable more confident claims about prevalence and magnitude. Comparative study with Hong Kong immigrants in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, conducted using comparable methodology, would test the National Health Insurance protective factor finding across different healthcare, legal, and cultural contexts. The contrast between Taiwan's system and the National Health Service access conditions for British National (Overseas) immigrants, documented in initial form by Liang [1], represents a particularly productive comparison for future qualitative investigation.

Two structured cross-group comparisons would further test the boundaries of these findings. Comparison with Tibetan immigrants in Taiwan, whose politically

precipitated migration Teng [34] documented, would hold the host state constant and isolate the effect of the cross-strait geopolitical position, while comparison with Hong Kong immigrants in the United Kingdom [1] would hold the origin population constant and remove the cultural-proximity expectation, together clarifying which mechanisms identified here are specific to the Taiwan context and which are general to politically driven Hong Kong emigration.

4. Conclusion

This study produced three contributions to the migration mental health literature. It demonstrated that vulnerability in this population was structurally configured through the interaction of immigration pathway, legal status, occupational conditions, and cultural context, and could not be reduced to political trauma alone. It identified cultural proximity as a source of distinctive adaptation difficulty, through which surface similarity generated invisible friction and self-blame rather than ease of settlement. And it documented an under-reported mechanism through which administrative opacity turned help-seeking into a perceived threat to legal status, positioning immigration governance as a direct determinant of mental healthcare access.

Taiwan's National Health Insurance system emerged as a protective factor that extended to comparative research on receiving countries. The three-layer insufficiency in Cantonese-capable mental health provision stood in sharp contrast to this general

protection, and pointed to a gap addressable without reform of the broader healthcare architecture.



The nine participants shared their accounts with openness under circumstances of ongoing political uncertainty. This thesis is offered as a contribution to the evidence base that policy, institutional practice, and the mental health field will need to serve them and those who follow.

VII. References



1. Liang, M., *Survey report of mental health amongst hong kong arrivals in the UK*. 2022, Hong Kongers in Britain.
2. Ni, M.Y., et al., *Depression and post-traumatic stress during major social unrest in Hong Kong: a 10-year prospective cohort study*. The Lancet, 2020. **395**(10220): p. 273–284.
3. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, *Survey findings on views about emigration from Hong Kong released by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at CUHK*. 2023.
4. Li, Y.-T. and B.-J. Liao, *An “unsettling” journey? Hong Kong’s exodus to Taiwan and Australia after the 2019 protests*. American Behavioral Scientist, 2025. **69**(3): p. 339–357.
5. 紀惠容, 監察院促請行政院正視香港護理人員申請專業移民定居所遭遇各項困境, 並要求大陸委員會深切檢討相關措施之缺失, 另責成內政部督導移民署確依最新之審查基準, 加速處理審查作業, 積極維護其等權益. 2023.
6. 中華民國內政部移民署, 大陸地區人民、港澳居民、無戶籍國民來臺居留、定居人數統計表 11404. 2025.
7. Ni, M.Y., et al., *Longitudinal Patterns and Predictors of Depression Trajectories Related to the 2014 Occupy Central/Umbrella Movement in Hong*

Kong. Am J Public Health, 2017. **107**(4): p. 593–600.



8. Lawson, E., *The Political Determinants of Health*. Br J Gen Pract, 2020. **70**(701): p. 571.
9. Bambra, C., et al., *Tackling the wider social determinants of health and health inequalities: evidence from systematic reviews*. J Epidemiol Community Health, 2010. **64**(4): p. 284–91.
10. Hoffmann, B., *Bringing Hirschman Back In: “Exit”, “Voice”, and “Loyalty” in the Politics of Transnational Migration*. The Latin Americanist, 2010. **54**(2): p. 57–73.
11. Hirschman, A.O., *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. 1972: Harvard university press.
12. Berry, J.W., *Theories and models of acculturation*, in *The Oxford handbook of acculturation and health*. 2017, Oxford University Press: New York, NY, US. p. 15–28.
13. Chan, K. and P.J. Huxley, *Social inclusion: Theoretical development and cross-cultural measurements*. Vol. 2. 2022: City University of HK Press.
14. Bhugra, D. and A. Ventriglio, *Political determinants of mental health*. Int J Soc Psychiatry, 2023. **69**(3): p. 521–522.
15. 彭仁郁, 本土心理學家碰政治之後—織構一張具轉型正義視角的跨專業

療癒網絡。本土心理學研究, 2022(57): p. 149–164.

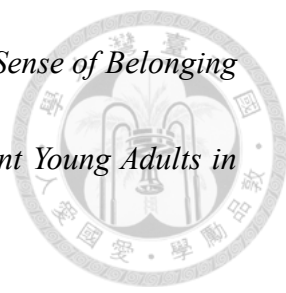


16. 李澄欣, 香港移民潮: 港人在台灣陷法律、國安困局 「二次移民潮」是否陸續有來, in *BBC Chinese*. 2023.
17. 王艾寧, 港人來台移民政策 至今竟無明確法規, in *Now News*. 2025.
18. Ho, W.-C. and K.K.-w. Fung, *Cultural Conflict and Disappointment: Hongkongers' Sentiments Toward Taiwanese Authorities Amid Cross-Strait Tensions*. Societies, 2024. **14**(10): p. 210.
19. Anderson, B., *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, in *The new social theory reader*. 2020, Routledge. p. 282–288.
20. Constitutional Court R.O.C (Taiwan), No.328 **【The Boundaries of National Territory Case】**, C. court, Editor. 1993.
21. Kironka, K., *Taiwan's Road to an Asylum Law: Who, When, How, and Why Not Yet?* Hum Rights Rev, 2022. **23**(2): p. 241–264.
22. 勞動部勞動力發展署, 外國人是否包含大陸及港澳地區人士?, 勞動部勞動力發展署, Editor. 2025.
23. 國家發展委員會, 真的好想留下妳(你)! 2026 年起僑外生畢業 2 年內工作免許可, 自由開啟在臺職涯. 2026.
24. 勞動部勞動力發展署, 依一般依薪資、工作經驗等條件申請, 勞動部勞動力發展署, Editor. 2024.

- 
25. 劉雅婷, 【時代現場】流亡港人創傷進行式 政治暴力與抗爭後遺(上),
in *Mirror Media*. 2021.
26. 劉雅婷, 【時代現場】流亡港人的療癒之道 政治暴力與抗爭後遺(下),
in *Mirror Media*. 2021.
27. 趙雲、李慧筠, 你而家喺邊? 離開「我的地頭」睇醫生, 未知恐懼與語言
隔閡, in 端傳媒. 2024.
28. Home Affairs Committee, UK House of Commons., *The UK's offer of visa and
settlement routes for residents of Hong Kong*. 2021.
29. 陳琪, 庇護被拒、創傷後遺, 誰來織起移英港人的情緒互助「安全網」?,
in 端傳媒. 2024.
30. Yue, R. and B.H.P. Lau, *The pains amidst starting a new life: investigating
adjustment disorder in Hong Kong migrants' transition to the UK*. Scientific
Reports, 2025. **15**(1): p. 40545.
31. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Permanent residence pathways
for Hong Kong residents*. 2026.
32. Yan, M.C., et al., *Survey study on Hong Kong residents recently arrived in
Canada (second wave) : Preliminary report*. 2025.
33. Government of Australia, *Skilled Independent visa (subclass 189) Hong Kong
stream*, Australian Dept of Home Affairs, Editor. 2026.

34. Teng, H.-I., 在臺藏人移動創傷與社會工作介入之難題; *Tibetans in Taiwan: Struggles with Immigrant Trauma and Social Work Intervention*. 人文及社會科學集刊; Journal of Social Sciences and Philosophy. Vol. 35. 2023. 759–801.
35. WHO, *Social determinants of health*. 2024.
36. Karatekin, C., et al., *Re-politicizing the WHO's social determinants of health framework*. Health Promot Int, 2024. **39**(5).
37. Smith, J.A., M. Larkin, and P. Flowers, *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. 2021.
38. 中華民國內政部移民署, 香港澳門居民申請在臺灣地區居留送件須知. 2025.
39. Younas, A., et al., *Providing English and native language quotes in qualitative research: A call to action*. Nurs Open, 2022. **9**(1): p. 168–174.
40. *World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects*. Jama, 2013. **310**(20): p. 2191–4.
41. Palinkas, L.A., et al., *Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research*. Adm Policy Ment Health, 2015. **42**(5): p. 533–44.
42. Robinson, O., *Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 2014. **11**.

- 
43. Bailey, C., et al., *What Are We Missing? How Language Impacts Trauma Narratives*. J Child Adolesc Trauma, 2020. **13**(2): p. 153–161.
44. Dahlgren, G. and M. Whitehead, *Policies and strategies to promote social equity in health*. Stockholm: Institute for future studies, 1991. **27**(1): p. 4–41.
45. Chan, A.K.W., et al., *Hong Kong's new wave of migration: socio-political factors of individuals' intention to emigrate*. Comparative Migration Studies, 2022. **10**(1): p. 49.
46. 曹馥年, 台灣, 似近又遠——不同世代移台港人的融入與隔膜, in *The Reporter*. 2020.
47. 曹馥年, 何., 他們為什麼愛台灣:「命運共同體」的台灣與香港人, 真正了解彼此嗎?, in *the reporter*. 2020.
48. 陳朗熹, 新香港故事: 離開, 是為了保留自由, in *the reporter*. 2020.
49. 呂大樂, 四代香港人. 2007, Hong Kong: 進一步多媒體有限公司.
50. Verkerk, L., et al., *Expression and interpretation of emotions in multilingual psychotherapy: A literature review*. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 2023. **23**(3): p. 617–626.
51. O'Brien, C.V. and D. Charura, *Refugees, asylum seekers, and practitioners' perspectives of embodied trauma: A comprehensive scoping review*. Psychol Trauma, 2023. **15**(7): p. 1115–1127.

- 
52. Park, C., J.Y. Bang, and M. Edberg, *Language Identity and Sense of Belonging Among 1.5 Generation Asian and Asian American Immigrant Young Adults in the United States*. Asian Am J Psychol, 2026.
53. 台灣兒童青少年精神醫學會, [立法院心理衛生與精神醫療資源不足檢討與政策促進公聽會] 新聞稿. 2017.
54. 衛生福利部, 非本國籍人士, 中央健康保險署, Editor. 2026.
55. Baral, S.P., P. Prasad, and G. Raghuvamshi, *Mental Health Awareness And Generation Gap*. Indian Journal of Psychiatry, 2022. **64**(Suppl 3): p. S636.
56. 梁景鴻, 看得到難拿到的「專案身分」——上千香港尋求庇護者通不過的兩道窄門. 2022.
57. 李洛, 台灣執政民進黨力推移民修正草案, 為何香港申請人成「磨心」?, in *BBC Chinese*. 2025.
58. Monima, S., 台國際學生心理健康服務利用之混合方法研究. 2025.
59. 紀惠容委員、葉大華委員、施錦芳委員, 調查報告, 監察院, Editor. 2023.

VIII. Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Topics and Approach

Interview Framework: This study employs semi-structured interviews consistent with IPA methodology, emphasizing participant-led dialogue while systematically exploring how political determinants intersect with social factors to shape mental health experiences. The framework integrates trauma-informed protocols with political sensitivity considerations, recognizing that participants navigate ongoing political surveillance concerns alongside psychological adaptation challenges.

Core Topic Areas

1. Current Life and Political Context in Taiwan Sample questions:

- "Could you tell me about your daily life in Taiwan now?"
- "How do you experience Taiwan's political environment compared to what you expected?"
- "What aspects of living here feel politically safe or concerning to you?"

2. Migration Decision and Political Influences Sample questions:

- "What led you to choose Taiwan specifically as your destination?"
- "How did political developments in Hong Kong influence your decision to leave?"
- "What role did Taiwan's political system play in your choice?"

3. Political Identity and Civic Participation Sample questions:

- "How has your sense of political identity changed since moving to Taiwan?"
- "What are your experiences with political expression or civic participation here?"
- "How do you navigate discussing political topics in Taiwan?"

4. Cross-Strait Political Pressures and Security Concerns Sample questions:

- "How do cross-strait political tensions affect your daily life or decisions?"
- "Do you experience concerns about political surveillance or safety? How does this affect you?"
- "How do you manage relationships with family or friends still in Hong Kong?"

5. Institutional Navigation and Political Barriers Sample questions:

- "How have political factors affected your immigration process or legal status?"
- "What has it been like dealing with Taiwan's immigration system and changing policies?"
- "How do political uncertainties affect your long-term planning or sense of security?"

6. Mental Health and Political Stressors Sample questions:

- "How do political concerns or uncertainties affect your overall wellbeing?"
- "What political factors contribute most to your stress or anxiety levels?"
- "How do you cope with political-related worries or trauma?"

7. Social Integration and Political Stigma Sample questions:

- "How do you experience social acceptance as a Hong Kong immigrant in Taiwan?"
- "Have you encountered political prejudice or misunderstanding? How does this affect you?"
- "Who do you turn to for support when dealing with political concerns?"

8. Healthcare Access and Political Sensitivities Sample questions:

- "How comfortable do you feel discussing political trauma or concerns with healthcare providers?"
- "What would ideal mental health support look like given your political circumstances?"

Political Determinants-Informed Protocols

Enhanced Safety Considerations:

- Explicit discussion of data security and confidentiality regarding political content
- Clear boundaries around what political information will and will not be recorded
- Participant control over political topic depth and detail
- Recognition that political surveillance anxiety may affect disclosure patterns

Political Sensitivity Integration:

- Acknowledgment that political trauma may be ongoing rather than past
- Understanding that help-seeking may be complicated by political mistrust
- Recognition of transnational political pressures affecting family relationships
- Awareness that democratic participation restrictions may conflict with refugee motivations

Three-Government Context Awareness:

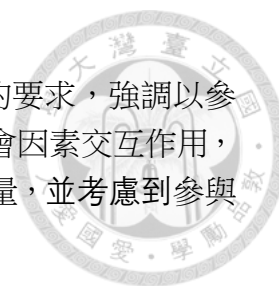
- Sensitivity to how Beijing's policies create ongoing fear
- Understanding of Taiwan's geopolitical constraints affecting immigrant policies
- Recognition of how cross-strait tensions create social integration challenges

Emergency Procedures: A network of 2 Cantonese-speaking counselling psychologists with experience in trauma informed approach has been established. Additional protocols include secure communication methods for participants expressing ongoing political safety concerns, and specialised referral pathways for trauma related to political persecution or surveillance anxiety.

Methodological Note: Following IPA's phenomenological approach, questions will emerge organically while ensuring systematic exploration of political determinants. The interviewer will remain particularly attentive to how participants navigate political discourse, noting self-censorship patterns, surveillance anxiety expressions, and identity reconstruction processes that may indicate political determinants operating alongside social factors in shaping mental health experiences.

Appendix A- Chinese: 訪談主題與方法

訪談架構 本研究採用半結構式訪談，符合詮釋現象學分析法的要求，強調以參與者為主導的對話，同時系統性地探討政治決定因素如何與社會因素交互作用，形塑心理健康經驗。此架構整合創傷知情協議與政治敏感性考量，並考慮到參與者在應對心理適應挑戰以及需面對持續的政治監控憂慮。



核心訪談主題

1. 當前生活與臺灣政治環境 範例問題:

- "能否談談您目前在臺灣的日常生活?"
- "您如何感受臺灣的政治環境，與您的預期相比如何?"
- "在這裡生活的哪些方面讓您在政治上感到安全或擔憂?"

2. 移居決定與政治影響因素 範例問題:

- "什麼原因讓您特別選擇臺灣作為目的地?"
- "香港的政治發展如何影響您離開的決定?"
- "臺灣的政治制度在您的選擇中扮演什麼角色?"

3. 政治認同與公民參與 範例問題:

- "移居臺灣後，您的政治認同感如何改變?"
- "您在這裡進行政治表達或公民參與的經驗如何?"
- "您如何處理在臺灣討論政治話題的情況?"

4. 兩岸政治壓力與安全憂慮 範例問題:

- "兩岸政治緊張關係如何影響您的日常生活或決定?"
- "您是否對政治監控或安全問題有所憂慮？這如何影響您?"
- "您如何維持與仍在香港的家人或朋友的關係?"

5. 制度導航與政治障礙 範例問題:

- "政治因素如何影響您的移民程序或法律地位?"
- "與臺灣移民系統及變動政策打交道的經驗如何?"
- "政治不確定性如何影響您的長遠規劃或安全感?"

6. 心理健康與政治壓力源 範例問題:

- "政治憂慮或不確定性如何影響您的整體福祉?"

- "哪些政治因素最能加劇您的壓力或焦慮水平？"
- "您如何應對政治相關的擔憂或創傷？"

7. 社會融合與政治污名 範例問題:

- "作為香港移民，您如何感受在臺灣的社會接納度？"
- "您是否遭遇過政治偏見或誤解？這如何影響您？"
- "在處理政治憂慮時，您會向誰尋求支持？"

8. 醫療照護獲取與政治敏感性 範例問題:

- "與醫療提供者討論政治創傷或憂慮時，您會有什麼感受？"
- "考量您的政治處境，理想的心理健康支持應該是怎樣的？"

政治決定因素知情協議

強化安全考量:

- 明確討論涉及政治內容的資料安全性與保密性
- 清楚界定哪些政治資訊將會或不會被記錄
- 參與者對政治話題深度與細節的控制權
- 認知政治監控焦慮可能影響揭露模式

政治敏感性整合:

- 承認政治創傷可能是持續進行而非過去事件
- 理解求助行為可能因政治不信任而複雜化
- 認知跨國政治壓力對家庭關係的影響
- 意識到民主參與限制可能與難民動機產生衝突

三政府環境意識:

- 對北京政策如何造成持續恐懼的敏感度
- 理解臺灣地緣政治限制對移民政策的影響
- 認知兩岸緊張關係如何造成社會融合挑戰

緊急程序 已建立由 2 位具創傷知情經驗的廣東話臨床心理師組成的網絡。額外協議包括為表達持續政治安全憂慮的參與者提供安全通訊方式，以及針對政治迫害或監控焦慮相關創傷的專門轉介途徑。



方法學註記 遵循詮釋現象學分析的現象學方法，問題將有機地浮現，同時確保系統性地探討政治決定因素。訪談者將特別留意參與者如何處理政治論述，注意自我審查模式、監控焦慮表達，以及認同重構過程，這些可能指出政治決定因素與社會因素共同作用於心理健康經驗的形塑過程。



Appendix B: Condensed interview summaries

Case Summary: Participant A

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant A was a middle-aged man who worked in a credentialed professional field and later pursued further study in Taiwan. He relocated during the COVID-19 pandemic through a professional immigration pathway. Previous overseas experience and pandemic-related disruption narrowed his options, while an existing professional contact made Taiwan a practical destination. His migration was therefore circumstantial rather than primarily political.

Having lived and trained abroad before the pandemic, he found his international work halted and his planned further study overseas closed off, and Taiwan emerged by circumstance rather than preference: it functioned relatively stable in the early pandemic, its professional visa was obtainable online within about two months, and a trusted senior was already based there who could provide assistance initially.

He summarised his acculturation as "superficially free and equal, but actually full of discrimination." Three frictions defined his trajectory. First, having lived where skepticisms toward state health mandates was common, he found Taiwan's COVID-19 compliance and mutual enforcement alienating. Second, he encountered serious credentialing and safety failures in his field and found his attempts to raise concerns suppressed, which caused significant distress and drove his decision to leave; he also saw a local reluctance to correct mistakes as inimical to professional development. Third, he experienced Taiwan's conflation of "Chinese" with "Mandarin" as dismissive of Cantonese speakers.

His support was narrow: an overseas professional network, the mentor, and a few older Hong Kong immigrants. He engaged little with healthcare, valuing Western medicine but troubled by its Mandarin-only environment, and declined mental health services, distrusting local data privacy and professional ethics. He coped through mentorship, travel, physical training, and faith. His identity was settled: primarily a Hong Konger, he rejected any Taiwanese identification and regarded Taiwan as transitional, planning to leave after his studies



Case Summary: Participant B

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant B was a middle-aged man working in a creative field who relocated through a family-dependent residency pathway linked to a family member's professional status. He later obtained permanent residency after a prolonged process.

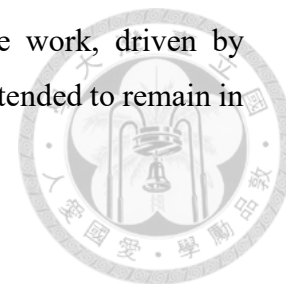
His migration was politically motivated, shaped by the 2014 Umbrella Movement and crystallised in the major event afterwards. The couple designated a specific, symbolically decisive political event as their threshold for departure and left within two months of it. A friend had urged him to secure residency documentation early, and a concurrent work opportunity provided the entry point.

His assessment of his life in Taiwan was ambivalent: "daily life is excellent, but work is genuinely painful." He learned Mandarin only after arrival; local Taiwanese tolerated his Cantonese accent, while the sharpest criticism came from fellow Hong Kong immigrants. Professionally, the sector's deference to seniority frustrated open exchange, his Hong Kong credentials carried no institutional weight, and funding processes showed inconsistent criteria and perceived discrimination against Hong Kong applicants. Relocation within Taiwan helped, as local services were more attuned to new-immigrant needs.

The multi-year permanent residency process was a sustained source of distress, with opaque requirements, difficult administrative encounters, and a high financial threshold that forced him to seek substantial informal support; he described this period as one of significant depressive distress. His support was largely informal, including peer relationships, community-based services and neighbourhood ties. These connections became especially important during difficulties with his residency application.

He had not used formal mental health services, deterred partly by advice that a mental health record could jeopardise his residency. He coped through traditional Chinese medicine, his creative work, and community ties. Periods of family separation triggered panic symptoms, while family presence and community ties provided some protection. He developed a strong identification with Taiwan and framed belonging as something earned through the prolonged residency process: "I spent [a prolonged period of time] proving myself. If I'm not Taiwanese, what am I?" He nevertheless continued to retain

his Hong Kong identity. Ongoing self-censorship in his creative work, driven by concern for family in mainland China, remained a frustration. He intended to remain in Taiwan, with family reunification and stability as his goals.



Case Summary: Participant C

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant C was a young adult university student who entered Taiwan during the COVID-19 period through an overseas-Chinese education pathway.

His migration was politically shaped but not directly precipitated by the social unrest. He had joined the major political events and recalled watching that summer's events with intense anger. The decisive turning point was the adoption of the controversial law, which, with pandemic restrictions, led him to conclude that "Hong Kong is dead." He left as quarantine restrictions eased. The absence of a proper farewell was among the most affectively charged threads in his account.

His assessment of Taiwan was broadly positive: "cultural shock, then you get used to it." He found local communication more indirect than his own and learned that his directness could read as abrasive. His Cantonese accent still marked him as a Hong Konger after a few years of immersion in Taiwan, which he regarded without distress.

He supported himself largely through campus part-time work, with tuition partly supplemented by family. He relied on regular family contact, a small peer network, university activities and faith-based support. Periods of solitude nevertheless remained emotionally difficult.

He had recently sought medical advice for stress-related symptoms but not formal counselling, managing low points through activity, study, and faith. He identified firmly as a Hong Konger while ambivalent about Hong Kong, acknowledging that "the Hong Kong I knew had largely disappeared" yet keeping cultural pride. His faith mediated his response to geopolitical uncertainty, framing the prospect of cross-strait conflict through an eschatological lens that afforded a paradoxical calm. He intended to graduate, find work, and possibly sit professional qualification examinations in Taiwan or abroad, with no plans to return to Hong Kong.



Case Summary: Participant D

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant D was a woman in her twenties or thirties who had worked in a professional sector in Hong Kong. She came to Taiwan on a student visa for graduate study, then moved onto a work visa and a professional role after graduating.

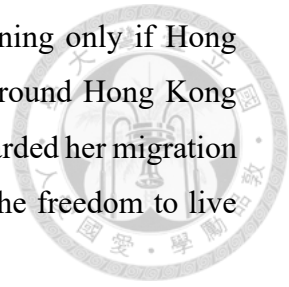
The 2019 social movement had a profound psychological impact on her: she experienced trauma responses, including sudden emotional breakdowns and sensory flashbacks, but did not seek help at the time. She normalized her distress as a collective experience. The movement provided the decisive push to leave. She chose Taiwan primarily because of close personal ties and secondarily because its proximity facilitated continued contact with family in Hong Kong. Her earlier professional background drew additional scrutiny during her application, which she found understandable in the post-movement context.

Her acculturation was broadly positive; the sharpest adjustments were Taiwan's traffic environment and a communication style more indirect than her own. Language was largely manageable, though colleagues noticed traces of Cantonese structure in her Mandarin. She had hoped for values-driven, public-interest work but found this legally constrained for foreign nationals, and volunteered in related causes as partial compensation. Though her salary exceeded the local average, she still felt constrained by legal limits on career mobility.

Her support drew on her partner, the university's Hong Kong and Macau student association, and like-minded Taiwanese she met through volunteering. Hong Kong friendships continued via social media, though she sometimes felt disconnected from home.

She viewed Taiwan's healthcare very positively for its low cost and efficiency. Having internalised a tendency to normalise distress, she had not sought mental health support in Hong Kong, but her university's active promotion of counselling shifted her toward seeing it as legitimate self-care; she managed early career anxiety without formal intervention.

She identified firmly as a Hong Konger and would consider returning only if Hong Kong regained autonomy. Aware of the constitutional ambiguity around Hong Kong people's status in Taiwan, she remained wary of policy shifts, yet regarded her migration as the right decision and had no plans to leave, valuing above all the freedom to live and speak openly.



Case Summary: Participant E

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant E was a woman in her young adulthood who came to Taiwan on a student visa for further study, with a long-term aspiration to enter a helping profession. Before relocating she had worked in a public-facing professional field in Hong Kong.

Her migration resulted from an accumulation of pressures rather than a single event. Her political awareness formed in 2014; the 2019 movement did not directly prompt her departure but disrupted her career path, and an expected professional opportunity fell through. The National Security Law and subsequent institutional changes then compelled rigorous self-censorship in her work, which she described as "living in 1984." Taiwan appealed mainly for a long-held vocational aspiration, alongside its affordability, proximity to Hong Kong, and accessible student visa.

She first felt "like a bird released from a cage," but within months recognised a "second cage," not political but cultural. Acculturation was persistently difficult: she found Taiwanese peers' friendliness performative, the strict senior-junior hierarchy awkward as most classmates were much younger, and a clash between Taiwan's "emotion-reason-rules" logic and Hong Kong's "rules-reason-emotion" orientation, so that escalating urgent matters directly, standard in Hong Kong, read as impolite. She also encountered gendered boundary violations that the institution did not adequately follow up.

Her support in Taiwan was thin; her anchors remained family and friends in Hong Kong, and a temporary return during acute distress lifted her from a very low state to an acceptable one. Connections in Taiwan, especially within her programme, were largely negative.

She sought mental health support in both Hong Kong and Taiwan but found it largely

ineffective, citing three barriers: no solution-oriented approach; a dual cultural gap, with practitioners in each place unfamiliar with the other's context; and the irreplaceability of Cantonese for conveying specific emotional experiences. She coped through reading, podcasts, exercise, and trips to Hong Kong.

She identified firmly as a Hong Konger and was critical of Taiwan's treatment of Cantonese speakers. Her retrospective view was largely negative: "Taiwan is like Japan, wonderful as a tourist, yet very hard to actually live and work in."

Case Summary: Participant F

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant F was a Hong Kong-born man in early adulthood who had completed a university degree overseas. He relocated to Taiwan through a family-based pathway tied to his Taiwanese spouse and later obtained legal incorporation, and he was active in a faith-based community.

His migration reflected both personal and structural considerations. During his final period of study abroad he experienced a serious deterioration in health. Deciding where to settle, he ruled out Hong Kong for its deteriorating political environment and ruled out staying overseas for its high living and healthcare costs. Taiwan offered accessible healthcare, a relatively stable family-based pathway, and a manageable cost of living. Shortly after arrival his condition relapsed, making healthcare access the central feature of his early settlement.

His early life in Taiwan was defined less by cultural adaptation than by medical treatment. Before qualifying for National Health Insurance he had to self-fund his care, creating financial pressure and confusion over reimbursement. Once covered, he found the system highly protective, describing care as attentive, efficient, and far more affordable than systems elsewhere, easing both his costs and the anxiety of managing illness.

Employment was not central to his identity. Although he explored work in his trained field, health and local salary expectations limited full-time pursuit, and he found meaning in part-time and voluntary work. His support centred on his spouse and

extended family, his faith-based community, and voluntary activities, while engagement with Hong Kong immigrant networks stayed limited; attending a Hong Kong-related event alone once left him isolated, showing that shared origin did not guarantee belonging.

His psychological state was generally stable, with illness rather than migration as the main source of distress, and he had not used formal mental health services. He described bitterness, helplessness, and survivor's guilt toward Hong Kong but redirected these into self-development, reading, exercise, and voluntary contribution, illustrating moral powerlessness transformed into meaning-making rather than acute destabilisation.

He identified as a Hong Kong person living in Taiwan. Legal incorporation did not erase his attachment to Hong Kong, yet he regarded Taiwan as his long-term home and did not plan to return, advising prospective migrants to plan carefully and avoid the compounded distress of repeated migration.

Case Summary: Participant G

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant G was a young adult who entered Taiwan through a student pathway and later transitioned to work-based residence in a professional role.

His migration was directly shaped by the 2019 social movement and the subsequent controversial law. He had been actively involved in the movement and later experienced physical and psychological consequences linked to that period. His academic results and future planning made overseas study a practical route out of Hong Kong, and Taiwan emerged as workable for its relative linguistic accessibility, proximity, and existing contacts. The Law strengthened his resolve to leave, as he found self-censorship and restrictions on expression incompatible with his wellbeing. His family strongly supported his departure.

His early adaptation was difficult. Quarantine and delayed arrival disrupted his integration at his first university, leaving him isolated and acutely distressed when his mental health was already fragile. After moving into a more supportive educational environment, his situation improved markedly and he gradually gained stability.

His later adaptation was largely positive. Fluency in Mandarin meant he was not always identified as foreign, and he adjusted well to daily life. He nonetheless kept some distance from Hong Kong migrant circles, preferring peers who shared his commitment to building a future in Taiwan, suggesting that shared origin alone did not produce belonging; future orientation mattered more.

He had pre-existing mental health vulnerabilities and acute distress early in relocation, attributing later improvement to the removal of political and academic pressures, a calmer environment, and more emotionally attentive care. He approached help-seeking pragmatically and named limited service awareness and reluctance to disclose vulnerability as key barriers among Hong Kong migrants.

His identity rested less on national belonging than on personal autonomy and professional achievement. He did not strongly foreground Hong Kong identity and firmly rejected identification with China, preferring to define himself through work, independence, and future development. He regarded Taiwan as a long-term home, was working toward more secure residence, and expressed no regret about leaving. His case illustrated a trajectory from acute vulnerability toward resilience through institutional stability, professional integration, and future-oriented self-definition.

Case Summary: Participant H

Interview date: 03/2026

Participant H was a midlife woman who entered Taiwan through a student pathway and later transitioned to employer-linked work residence.

Her migration reflected both practical and aspirational factors. Other destinations were less feasible financially and linguistically, while Taiwan's cultural and linguistic proximity made it seem more accessible. Further study also mattered to her, as she saw education in Taiwan as a chance to fulfil a long-standing aspiration and open a new stage of life.

Her initial impression was positive, but over time she developed a more complex view of Taiwanese interpersonal norms. Indirect communication around refusal, disagreement, and boundaries became a persistent source of anxiety, as she worried about misreading others or causing offence. Language remained one of her most sustained challenges: though she could communicate in Mandarin, she found it

insufficient for nuanced emotion, culturally specific experience, and psychological distress, and academic or formal writing was especially demanding.

After graduation her residence status became tied to her employment, so work was not only income but the condition for legal residence. As her savings declined, financial pressure grew, and the cost of private counselling became a practical concern.

Her support network was small but meaningful: a close Taiwanese partner offering daily emotional and practical support, a long-standing local friend who helped during an early period of distress, a supportive workplace relationship, and a few university friendships. Some ties with other Hong Kong migrants were fragile, and the loss of one remained emotionally significant.

She sought mental health support at several points, including university counselling and psychiatric care during acute workplace distress, and remained in psychiatric treatment at the interview. She named Cantonese-language mental health provision as the single most important improvement for Hong Kong migrants, estimating that Mandarin let her convey only part of what she wished; the remaining gap concerned emotional nuance, cultural meaning, and the texture of lived experience.

She identified consistently as a Hong Konger living in Taiwan, with deep attachment to Cantonese as an irreplaceable language of emotional expression. She intended to remain long term, while recognising that settlement required humility, adaptation, and continued navigation of local norms.

Case Summary: Participant Z

Participant Z was a midlife man who moved to Taiwan through a family-based pathway and maintained continuity in a specialised professional field. Family connections and concern for his child's educational environment were central to the decision to relocate.

His migration was not primarily politically motivated but shaped by family connections to Taiwan and concern for his child's educational environment. Having visited regularly over many years, the family already had some familiarity with local life. They relocated because Taiwan was seen as offering a less pressured environment for the child's development than Hong Kong's highly competitive education system, and prior professional preparation made the career transition more feasible.

His adaptation was relatively smooth, helped by an optimistic temperament, pre-existing local ties, and continuity in his professional work. The COVID-19 period,

though disruptive, unexpectedly created new local opportunities in his field, letting him re-establish professional continuity, and his specialised expertise was valued within relevant networks.

His spouse's adaptation was more complicated. Though Taiwanese by background, she had spent many years in Hong Kong and had to rebuild social and family connections after returning. This showed that "return" migration for a Taiwanese spouse was not necessarily effortless, and that family-based migration could involve adjustment for the whole household.

Healthcare access was among the strongest protective factors in his account. He underwent a significant medical procedure in Taiwan and described the diagnostic and treatment process as thorough, efficient, and emotionally responsive, with most costs covered by National Health Insurance. His account illustrated how the system could provide both practical security and institutional trust.

His support centred on his spouse and extended family, professional contacts, and neighbourhood relationships; engagement with Hong Kong immigrant networks was limited and incidental. He had not sought formal mental health support, describing himself as generally optimistic and naming family partnership as his primary emotional anchor.

Over time he developed a growing identification with Taiwan through sustained immersion in local life, while continuing to recognise his Hong Kong background. His outlook toward geopolitical uncertainty was pragmatic, and he expressed no desire to return. His case illustrated how family anchoring, professional continuity, and healthcare security can form a protective settlement configuration even when migration is not primarily political.