International Institute of Social Studies

Uncertainties upon Uncertainties: An Ethnographic Research on the Migration Experiences of British National (Overseas) Migrants in the UK

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Every decisive political event were double-sided:
the space, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers
always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals' life within the state order.

--Giorgio Agamben, 2013

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List of Acronyms

BC   British Citizenship

BN(O)   British National (Overseas)

FTE   Full-time Equivalent

HKB   Hongkongers in Britain

ICIBI   Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

ILR   Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK

LOTR   Leave Outside The Rule

NHS   National Health Service

NI   National Insurance

NSL   National Security Law

PTSD   Post-traumatic stress disorder

SBJD   Sino-British Joint Declaration

TB   Tuberculosis

Abstract

This paper unfolds the layered uncertainties faced by British National (Overseas) [BN(O)] migrants, reflecting their "uncertainties upon uncertainties" journey from pre-departure events in Hong Kong to settlement in the UK. Employing an ethnographic research method, the study delves into the daily lives of BN(O) migrants, exploring how the voluntary migration track design of the scheme exacerbates challenges for BN(O) migrants in settling in the UK. As shown in the research, the uncertainties faced by BN(O) migrants are also entwined with cultural differences, family dynamics, and age-related expectations. Dual cultural influences, difficulties in accessing tacit cultural knowledge, and disruptions in building social networks further complicate their journey. The paper also illustrates that, despite these challenges, BN(O) migrants actively exercise their agency to navigate and negotiate through their challenges. This study advocates for more nuanced migration policies, emphasising the need for targeted support systems. Additionally, it calls for further research into the evolving dynamics and challenges faced by BN(O) migrants, as uncertainties persist in their future.

Keywords

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to this research: When Uncertainties Arise

At 11:00 p.m. on 30th June 2020, a breaking news report shattered the silence:

> "Good evening, we have some breaking news about the National Security Law for you. The government has gazetted the law, which means acts considered as sedition, secession, terrorism, and collusion with foreign powers are now crimes in the city." (TVB Pearl News, 2020, 00:00:00-00:00:12)

This news not only disrupted the calmness of the night, but also the calmness of a lot of people's life in a borrowed place with borrowed time – Hong Kong.

This chapter is going to introduce the historical moments when Hong Kongers experienced uncertainties in their homeland, also the fate-altering gateway that delivered to them recently by the British government and provide some information about the people who decided to follow that gateway. This chapter also provides further information about this research.

1.1.1 Hong Konger's First Brush with Uncertainty: The Transfer of Sovereignty

To understand the context better, we must rewind to two key frames in the history of Hong Kong – the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong on 1st July 1997 and the summer of 2019.

As summarised precisely by Stott et. al. (2020), "Hong Kong is not and never has been a sovereign nation but is a former British Colony that is now a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China" (p.816). The transfer of sovereignty done on 1st July 1997 was a result of the negotiations between the Chinese government and British government. The negotiations were conducted in secrecy (Cheng, 1984). Hong Kongers were only being informed about the result: the Sino-British Joint Declaration (SBJD) was signed on 19 December 1984, the sovereignty of Hong Kong would be transfer to China under the arrangement of "One Country, Two Systems" on 1st July 1997, assuring the capitalist system and way of life in Hong Kong will remain unchanged for 50 years. The historical speech delivered by Margaret Thatcher outside the Great Hall of the People after signing the SBJD still resonates in the minds of Hong Kongers.

> The concept of "one country, two systems," preserving two different political, social and economic systems within one nation has no precedent. It offers an administrative and imaginative response to the special historical circumstances of Hong Kong. (Thatcher, 1984)

And, in the Memoranda of SBJD, the British government (1984) declared that:

> All persons who on 30 June 1997 are, by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong, British Dependent Territories Citizens (BDTCs) under the law in force in the United Kingdom will cease to be BDTCs with effect from 1 July 1997, but will be eligible to retain an appropriate status which, without conferring the right of abode in the United

Kingdom, will entitle them to continue to use passports issued by the Government of the United Kingdom.

Subsequently, The Hong Kong (British Nationality) Order 1986 was enacted by the British Government, introducing a new form of British nationality - British Nationals (Overseas) [BN(O)]. The order also stated that starting from 1st July 1997 onwards, Hong Kong would be removed from the list of dependent territories. This Order marked the birth of the BN(O) passport – which played and continue to play an important role in Hong Kongers' fate. This will be further elaborated in this paper.

Back to the time when 1st July 1997 was approaching, as one of my participants in this project recalled, "*the whole society was shrouded by anxiety, no one knew what exactly was going to happen*". Under this background, some Hong Kongers decided to migrate, especially to Australia, Canada and the United States. The number of people who migrated from Hong Kong to Canada soared from 5893 in 1986 to 38841 in 1992 (Skeldon, 1994). This marked the first migration wave in Hong Kong in the past half-century.

A few years after the transfer of sovereignty, with a relatively smooth transition, the migration wave slowed down.

1.1.2 Hong Konger's Second Brush with Uncertainty: The Truncated Autonomy

Just when everyone believes this long-standing stability will persist until at least 2047 - the year when the "50-year unchanged" commitment is going to conclude, the massive, prolonged protests in 2019 abruptly altered the course of events.

In early 2019, the Hong Kong government introduced the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019, expanding the scope of the current extradition law to cover surrendering fugitives to Macau and China. Despite the amendment was initially introduced to address a murder case in Taiwan involving a Hong Kong resident, it "touched on a deep-held fear of generations of Hong Kong people who fled from chaos in China in the past century and have an abiding distrust of the systems in the mother country" (Purbrick, 2019, p.482).

As a result, millions of Hong Kongers took to the streets in protest. Among these protesters, a significant majority belonged to the age group of 20-29, followed by those aged 30-39, and then individuals aged 19 or below (Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2019). This group of Hong Kongers, according to recent research, has the least confidence in Hong Kong's future (The Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, 2023).

Fear, distrust, and a profound lack of confidence were fully reflected during the protests. Advocacy for Hong Kong independence had become frequent. "Reclaim Hong Kong, revolution of our time" has become the most frequently chanted slogan. Protestors carried "Hong Kong Independence" flags. The protest song "Glory to Hong Kong" was considered as the "national anthem" by some (Leung, 2019).

These acts were considered as a threat to the authority of the Chinese government over Hong Kong, leaving "the Central Authorities had no alternatives but to step in and take action" (Brand Hong Kong Management Unit, 2023). As a result, the scene depicted in the beginning of this chapter happened – the NSL was introduced on the 30th of June 2020, 1 hour before the 23rd anniversary of the transfer of sovereignty.

On 1st July 2020, 10 arrests were made against individuals who displayed or possessed flag or banner advocating Hong Kong independence. On 2nd July 2020, "Liberate Hong Kong, the Revolution of Our Times" was declared as inciting "Hong Kong independence" by the Hong Kong government. In August 2020, Jimmy Lai, the founder of the largest pro-democracy newspaper in Hong Kong - Apple Daily, was arrested, and the newspaper's office was searched. Eventually, this newspaper was forced to cease operations in June 2021. A few months later, on 6th January 2020, more than 50 members from the democratic camp who participated or organised the 2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy primaries were arrested. By the end of February, 47 of them were charged conspiracy to commit subversion under NSL.

Following this wave of arrests, 58 groups or organisations, including three additional independent news platforms and many labour unions, disbanded (Hong Kong Free Press, 2022). Additionally, politically sensitive books were removed from public libraries, national security education was introduced at all levels of education, and all civil servants were required to sign a statement pledging allegiance to the Basic Law and Hong Kong.[1]

This chain of events created a profound shock in Hong Kong society. The panic experienced just before the transfer of sovereignty seemed to return. Under this historical backdrop, Hong Kongers, once again searching for their way out.

1.1.3 The BN(O) Visa Scheme: A Beacon of Hope in Uncertain Times?

In this trajectory, countries rolled out "lifeboat schemes", offering simplified pathways for Hong Kongers to migrate. This includes the "Permanent Residence Pathways for Hong Kong Residents" by the Canadian government which targeted at recent graduates or those who have worked in Canada for at least 12 months full-time, or an equal number of part-time hours (at least 1,560 hours in total) in 3 years before they applied (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021); and the "Skilled Independent Visa (Subclass 189) Hong Kong Stream" by the Australian government which requires applicants to have lived in Australia for 4 years before application (The Department of Home Affairs, Australian Government, 2022). These schemes, targeted at BN(O) passport holders who have resided in Canada or Australia for a certain period of time, are incompatible with the urgent need of Hong Kongers to cope with such shock.

Therefore, some Hong Kongers, viewed the Hong Kong BN(O) visa scheme rolled out by the British government as the last straw to be grasped. This feeling is particularly strong for one of my participants, who was eligible to obtain British citizenship (BC) before the transfer of sovereignty under British Nationality Selection Scheme but did not take that option at that time.

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[1] For a more detailed list of events happened in Hong Kong, see Appendix I.

As early as June 2020, following the decision of China's National People's Congress to empower the National People's Congress Standing Committee to enact a national security law in Hong Kong, the UK government announced its plan to provide a settlement route for BN(O) status holders from Hong Kong. In July 2020, the UK government announced the details of the new immigration route, and the estimated date for this route to become effective – January 2021.

In consideration of some BN(O) status holders may "wish to travel sooner" (Home Office, 2020a, p.8), the UK government also granted Leave Outside of The Rules (LOTR) to them upon arrival at the UK border from July 2020 onwards, even if they are not eligible for entry through other immigration route. With LOTR, BN(O) status holders and their accompanying dependants can reside and work or study in the UK for 6 months and then applied for BN(O) visa when the scheme is fully operational.

The Hong Kong BN(O) visa scheme was officially introduced into legislation by a statement of changes to the Immigration Rules in the UK on 22 October 2020. Under the new rules, 2 visa routes, namely Hong Kong BN(O) status Holder route and Hong Kong BN(O) Household Member route was introduced. The BN(O) Status Holder route is applicable to BN(O) Status holders, their partner or spouse and dependent children or grandchildren under the age of 18; while the Hong Kong BN(O) Household Member route applies to adult child or the partner of a BN(O) status holder who born after 1 July 1997 (Home Office, 2023a). At that time, the dependent members or household members are required to apply at the same time as the main applicants.

Under this scheme, BN(O) status holders, their immediate family dependants, comprising spouse or partner and children aged under 18, will be eligible to apply for the BN(O) Visa, to reside and work or study in the UK for up to 5 years.[2] After 5 years of continuous residence in the UK, they can apply for settlement. "Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK" (ILR) will be granted when they passed the Life in UK test and meeting minimum English language requirements. After obtaining ILR for 12 months, they can further apply for BC (Home Office, 2020a).

This scheme is a relatively indiscriminate one – as long as the applicant possess BN(O) status, can demonstrate their ability to accommodate and support themselves in the UK for at least six months, hold a current tuberculosis test certificate, pay the visa fee and the Immigration Health Surcharge as they apply for the visa, they are welcome to the UK (ibid.). [3]

BN(O) visa holders will have access to the National Health Service (NHS) since they have paid the Immigration Health Surcharge. They have to pay taxes and national insurance according to the UK law. School aged children who aged under 18 will have access to public

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[2] Applicants can choose to apply for the visa for 30 months, and then renew it for another 30 months, or apply for 5 years at once. The first option is predominated among young BN(O) status holder, at least in my research, as they don't have enough savings to pay for the visa fee for 5 years at one time.
[3] There are further requirements for applicants using the BN(O) Household Member route. For example, for unmarried partners, applicants have to prove that he or she been living with the BN(O) status holder together in a relationship similar to marriage or civil partnership for at least two years before the date of application (Home Office, 2020a).

education. They also enjoy certain civic rights like the right to vote and stand for office in elections as they are regarded as Commonwealth citizens in terms of political rights (ibid.).

However, they were excluded from access to all public funds, including unemployment and housing benefits, until an amendment made in April 2021 (ibid). Specific requirements must be met by those who wish to access public funds. These requirements include demonstrating destitution, presenting reasons related to the welfare of a child whose parent has a very low income, or facing exceptional financial circumstances. Cases will be assessed by a caseworker on a case-by-case basis (Neal, 2022).

Besides the above amendment, there are also several changes made to the BN(O) visa scheme since it implemented. For example, starting from October 2021, dependent partners and children are not required to apply for a visa at the same time as the BN(O) status holders. Starting from November 2022, individuals born on or after 1 July 1997, with at least one parent having the BN(O) status, can apply to the route independently of their Hong Kong BN(O) parent. This change is significant, as it:

> allows a specific cohort of individuals aged 18 to 25, who are too young to have qualified under the initial Hong Kong BN(O) visa process, to be able to move to the UK on their own even if their Hong Kong BN(O) parent does not wish to apply, or if their Hong Kong BN(O) parent wishes to remain in Hong Kong. (Neal, 2022, pp.5-6)

One of my participants in this research was benefited from this change. His case will be discussed in Chapter 3.3.

1.1.4 Those Who Rode on the Lifeboat

Given the timeliness and the relatively indiscriminatory nature of the visa scheme, together with the cultural proximity that some, including my research participants, may imagine before they actually arrived - English is still one of Hong Kong's official language and has introduced to the curriculum since the colonial rule, and expanded from secondary schools and primary schools to kindergarten nowadays; buildings in Victorian style are still preserved and dispersed across the city; road signs in Hong Kong and the UK are more or less the same, 160,700 people have decided to kick start their "customer journey"[4] by the end of December 2022 (Home Office, 2023b).

Among them, 32% are from the 45-54 age group, 29% are from the 35-44 age group, and those who are more actively engaged in the 2019 protest, the 25-34 age group, came third – 19%. Out of surprise, the 18-24 age group, who are most active in the 2019 protest only occupied for

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[4] "Customer journey" is the exact terminology that used in the policy statement for the BN(O) visa scheme. It involves 4 stages: "planning to come", "the application process", "living in the UK" and "application for settled status/citizenship" (Home Office, 2020a, p.11). The use of this terminology will be criticised later in this paper.

2%. The low number of applicants from this age group is probably due to the fact that they generally do not possess BN(O) passport and cannot apply independently through the household member route until 30 November 2022, together with some practical constraints like they are still in their studies, or they do not have enough resources to do so as one could imagine.

For some, like two of the families that participated in this research (comprising a total of 6 individuals), the decision to embark on this "lifeboat" was decided by the parents in that family in view of their child(ren)'s active involvement in the 2019 protests. These parents viewed migration as a way to ensure their children's safety and future prospects. There are also a few others who had already been residing outside Hong Kong for a period and were seeking a more permanent place to settle, including 2 of my participants in this research.

For the majority, the decision to migrate was solely driven by the uncertainties about Hong Kong's future and their own personal safety. This group includes former journalists, politicians, individuals who had worked for those disbanded organisations, and those who had participated in the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Their decision to migrate was based on the need for political and personal stability in light of Hong Kong's evolving situation. This group, proportionally, occupied the largest number in this research (9 out of 17).

Given the driver of the majority who decided to follow the BN(O) visa scheme is similar with refugees, some of them used the word "*fled*" when describing their own situation. Three of my participants even regard themselves are in "*forced exile*".

I still cannot forget a short conversation between one of my participants who regarded himself is in a "*forced exile*", a stranger and me during my fieldwork. That time, my participant and I were smoking outside my accommodation, a stranger joined our chit-chat. In the end, that stranger said he was going home then, and my participant responded, "*Home is away from us now, about 7-8 hours of time difference, and a direct flight will take like 12 hours*". "*Oh really? My home is just 15 minutes away from here,*" that stranger replied. Both my participant and I went silent for a few moments afterwards.

The use of "forced exile" will be further discussed in Chapter 2.2.1. However, no matter what terminology they used to describe their departure to the UK, a feeling of uprooted is rather prevalent among them, while they were all put under the same name – BN(O) visa migrants, expecting them to be self-sustained, going through the "customer journey" step-by-step, and be an "ideal migrant".[5]

The creation of a "BN(O) migrant"[6] category is powerful. Legally, it spells out the eligibility, entitlement and rights of BN(O) migrants. Socially, it affects how the BN(O) migrants

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[5] This was evidenced in the policy statement related to BN(O) visa scheme, when Priti Patel spelt out the requirements that BN(O) status holders need to fulfil when making their applications, she mentioned that "these are **reasonable things to ask** of BN(O) **citizens**, and **BN(O) citizens will need to ask themselves whether coming to the UK to put down roots here is the right choice for them**". (Home Office, 2020a, p.1)

[6] Despite Priti Patel referred BN(O) status holder as "BN(O) citizens", they do not possess full citizenship rights which a citizen should be entitled to. Therefore, in this paper, I used "BN(O) migrants" instead.

perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Throughout my research, only one discussion arguing BN(O) passport should have the same status as Brtish passport came up. For all other participants, they are going through their "customer journey" with a lot of challenges and obstacles emerged, in contrast with a streamlined service that "customer journey" this word entails. Chapter 2.2.1 is going to engage in a theoretical discussion about the categorisation of migrants and how it can impact migrants' migration experience.

1.2 About This Research

1.2.1 Research Objectives and Questions

This research paper aims to delve into the everyday lives of BN(O) migrants, to gain a detailed understanding of their migration experiences, so as to fill the research gap in this specific context. It is hope that by capturing their experiences, insights for migration studies and policies can be gained.

To achieve the above objectives, this research paper centers around a primary question:

What are the migration experiences of BN(O) migrants?

To delve deeper into their migration experiences, four sub-questions are established:

1) How are uncertainties created throughout their migration processes?
2) What are the factors contributing to these uncertainties?
3) How do they navigate and negotiate these uncertainties?

1.2.2 Justification and Relevance

As mentioned above, this research paper will focus on the migrants' life under BN(O) visa scheme. The BN(O) visa scheme is a newly created migration route based on the colonial connections between Hong Kong and the UK under a special political situation. Research in migration studies has illustrated that post-colonial ties have their influences in migration regime. For countries which became independent, they generally experienced the closure of migration opportunities to the former colonial state; for countries who have shifted to non-sovereign status, they continued to benefit from open migration regimes with their former colonial state (Vezzoli and Flahaux, 2016). What makes the BN(O) case unique, is the migration regime has been closed to them when Hong Kong was shifted to a non-sovereign status in 1997, but it has been reopened 23 years later.

This operation, while perhaps unintended by the UK government, shares interesting parallel with "hunger marketing", a strategy that creates unavailability to increase the desirability of a resource. In behavioural economics, it was proven that unavailability or scarcity can significantly impact decision-making processes (Lynn, 1992; Mittone and Savadori, 2009 etc.). When combined with the profound stress stemming from uncertainties about Hong Kong's future, these conditions create a distinct mental state for Hong Kongers.

This context affects not only migration decisions, but also preparations for the obstacles they would confront in UK. For instance, they may not be as financially prepared as other economic migrants. It also increases their acceptance of the BN(O) scheme and any adaptations made to it. Yet, the impact of these interrelated factors has not been thoroughly examined in existing studies. As such, this research paper serves as a valuable case study in the field of migration studies, offering insights into the experiences of BN(O) migrants and the support needed for their journey.

This paper has a strong focus on the migration experiences of young people aged 25-34. The selection of sample based on two main reasons. First, as mentioned in section 1.1.4, they were actively engaged in the 2019 protest but only occupied one-fifth of the total application number. It is reasonable to believe that there are some practice constraints that hinder them to migrate, and even if they managed to migrate, they may face more difficulties than the other age group. Second, youth is always associated with notions of hope and change, yet they are also in their transitional stage to adulthood, which implies growing responsibilities.

Understanding their migration experiences not only contributes to a more diverse and comprehensive picture of young migration, but also brings out their uniqueness - a combination of hope, responsibility, and the numerous decisions they face in search of a brighter future.

1.3 Organisation of this paper

Following this introductory chapter, the findings of my fieldwork will be presented and discussed in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework of this research, the adopted methodology, and include a personal reflection on positionality and ethics. Chapter 3 delves into the uncertainties faced by BN(O) migrants during the planning and application stage. Chapter 4 focuses on the life in UK – the uncertainties that they are facing on a daily basis. Chapter 5 delves deeper into their coping strategies. Finally, Chapter 6 provides some concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Exploring the Uncertainties

In preparation to delve into the journey of BN(O) migrants, this chapter explains the theoretical points of departure and methodology.

2.1 Theoretical Points of Departure

2.1.1 Positioning BN(O) Migrants: The Forced Migration VS Voluntary Migration Discussion

Derived from the Latin root *migrare*, the word "migration" refers to the movement from one place to another. Throughout history, international migration has a close relationship with economic, social and political development. Sometimes it can be a force for development, while sometimes it is a result of development. Depending on the factors influencing migration, migration is always being categorised into different types. One of the most common categorisations is voluntary migration and forced migration (Wickramasinghe and Wimalaratana, 2016). States, accordingly, created different migratory processes following these categorisations.

While migration policies produce a clear-cut definition of the types of migrants, scholars have pointed out that "the boundaries between forced and voluntary migration are inherently blurred and their analytical value is limited" (Bakewell, 2021, p. 125). This is also the case for BN(O) migrants. The BN(O) visa scheme delivered to them share the characteristics of voluntary migration scheme – asking them to provide financial proof, undergo a TB test, and paying the visa fee and the Immigration Health Surcharge when they apply the visa. Even in the speech of Priti Patel, she described the decision to migrate to the UK as a "choice". For some, it may be the case; but for others, it is not. Even though some of them do not face immediate political threat, but the decision was made under the changing political environment in Hong Kong. So, to what extend can one regard this is a "free choice"? Furthermore, as the NSL has extraterritorial effect, speeches that one made outside Hong Kong can also be prosecuted when they return. In this case, return migration may not be safe or possible. This further blurs their status as forced or voluntary migrants. As a result, instead of voluntary migrants, some of them viewed themselves are in "*forced exile*" – being "cut off from their roots, their land, their past" (Said, 2000, p.176), and have no way to return.

As Bakewell (2021) points out, how far individuals are identified as forced or voluntary migrants has major implications for their migration experience – "in the eyes of many, while forced migrants deserve help and protection, those who have chosen to move must take responsibility for their own fate" (p.131). Given the discrepancy between the categorisation of their status by the UK government and the migrants themselves, this paper attempts to closely examine how such categorisation will impact BN(O) migrants' lived experiences.

2.1.2 Uncertainty in Migration

"Uncertainty" is the key theme of this paper and also the word that BN(O) migrants frequently use when describing their lived experience in the UK. Therefore, it is important to define "uncertainty" here and what analytical values it can add to the discussion on BN(O) migrants' lived experiences.

It could be true that "migration is both informed by risk and uncertainty and generates risk and uncertainty" (Williams and Baláž, 2011, p.167). However, in social sciences, it is slightly different from what the risk theorists proposed. Risks, in a social sciences understanding can be understood as "known uncertainties" (Horst and Grabska, 2015, p.5) or "a framing device which conceptually translates uncertainty from being an open-ended field of unpredicted possibilities into a bounded set of possible consequences" (Boholm, 2003, cited in Horst and Grabska, 2015, p.5). Therefore, uncertainty should play a dominant role in discussions of migration, rather than risk.

O'Connell (1997) suggested that two types of uncertainty enter into the migration decision. First, the current conditions in the destination country may not be observable. Second, the future conditions in both the origin and destination countries are unknown. According to him, the two type of uncertainties act in an opposite direction, where the first type of uncertainties can encourage "speculative or try your luck" migration (p.1), while the second type of uncertainties actually deterred relocation. In the case of BN(O) migrants, we can observe both types of uncertainty are in work.

Uncertainty certainly influences migrants' daily lives, especially when they are displaced by conflicts. They are experiencing both temporal and spatial aspects of uncertainty at the same time. For the temporal aspects, a lot of waiting – both in "quotidian forms" such as bureaucratic decisions and "open-ended forms" like uncertain futures – are involved in their migration experiences (Jacobsen, Karlsen and Khosravi, 2020, p.3). For spatial aspects, despite in the case of BN(O) migrants, the destination country may be more certain, however, the exact local council or even the accommodation they are going to stay in remains unknown.

As a result, "the short-term uncertainty of the everyday blends with the longer-term uncertainty of imagining a future that is somewhere else" (Horst and Grabska, 2015, p. 8) happens in the case of migration. Approaching the daily lives of BN(O) migrants using the concept of uncertainty can provide a better grasp of their situations and lead to a more comprehensive analysis of their decision to migrate and coping strategies when they are encountering uncertainties.

Besides, scholars have suggested that uncertainty in migration is socially constructed, implying that uncertainty is potentially "a social phenomenon produced in the context of migration" (Maas et al., 2021, p. 3561). Examining how "uncertainty" is being produced in the case of BN(O) migrants can, therefore, provide valuable insights to deconstruct some of the uncertainties.

2.1.3 Relational Approach to Youth

Youth is the main focus in this research paper as stated in the introduction chapter. Therefore, it is also important to conceptualise "youth" here. Different international organisations like United Nations and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and also different countries have different definitions of "youth", while these definitions are set according to chronological age of a person. However, defining youth merely according to age is arbitrary, and neglected the fact that "identities of children and others are produced through interactions with other age/generational groups and are in a constant state of flux" (Hopkins and Pain, 2007, p.289).

In Asian context, the idea of "social age" and "relative age" is always important (Huijsmans, 2017). For example, there are always some "social age deadlines" to be met, like when to get a stable job, when to get marry, when to get a child. The failure in making certain accomplishment at certain age would put an "adult" (in terms of chronological age) into the category of "youth" or even "children".

Research shows that migration always results in disrupted life transitions including "delay, acceleration or re-routing of transitions, goals and imagined biographic timelines, and dynamic, emergent and unpredictable dependencies" (Robertson, 2018, p. 174). Migrants are constantly under the sense of anxiety that multiple re-routings could leave them "fallen behind" (ibid., p.175). This could also be the case of young BN(O) migrants, as when they migrate to the UK, they need to start all over again, and this would probably result in a delay of their life transitions.

Therefore, this research paper uses a relational approach to age instead of solely chronological age when referring to "young migrants" as this could enhance better understanding of how BN(O) migrants' life trajectory and intergenerational dynamics are being altered by their decision to migrate. Centring youth in migration can also allow us to see how migration, time, life-course intersects to create and/or intensified the uncertainties that they experienced.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Methodological Consideration and Orientation

This research aims at exploring BN(O) migrants migration experience in a nuanced way, as close to their original perspectives as possible. Therefore, I adopted an ethnographic-oriented approach, to participate "in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts" with "a focus on the 'everyday', making strange what is common/taken-for granted" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3).

Fieldwork was conducted from 8th July to 4th August 2023 in the UK. Muti-sited ethnography was carried out. In a border sense, the whole research was carried out in 4 different local councils: Reading, Greater London, Warrington and Manchester (in chronological order). The selection of these sites were based on a survey by Hongkongers in Britain (HKB) (2021)

concerning the local councils preferred by BN(O) migrants for the first six months of their arrivals (See Map 2.1), together with a logic that including major urban centers and smaller local councils proximate to the major ones in the sample. The rationale was to observe and compare whether lives in these different local councils are different. However, due to constraints in time and resources, my stay in each place was relatively brief, preventing meaningful cross-site comparisons. Despite that, researching in different places in the UK still provides valuable insights, especially when some of my participants had undergone internal migration within the UK after their arrival.

Map 2.1
Research sites in the UK
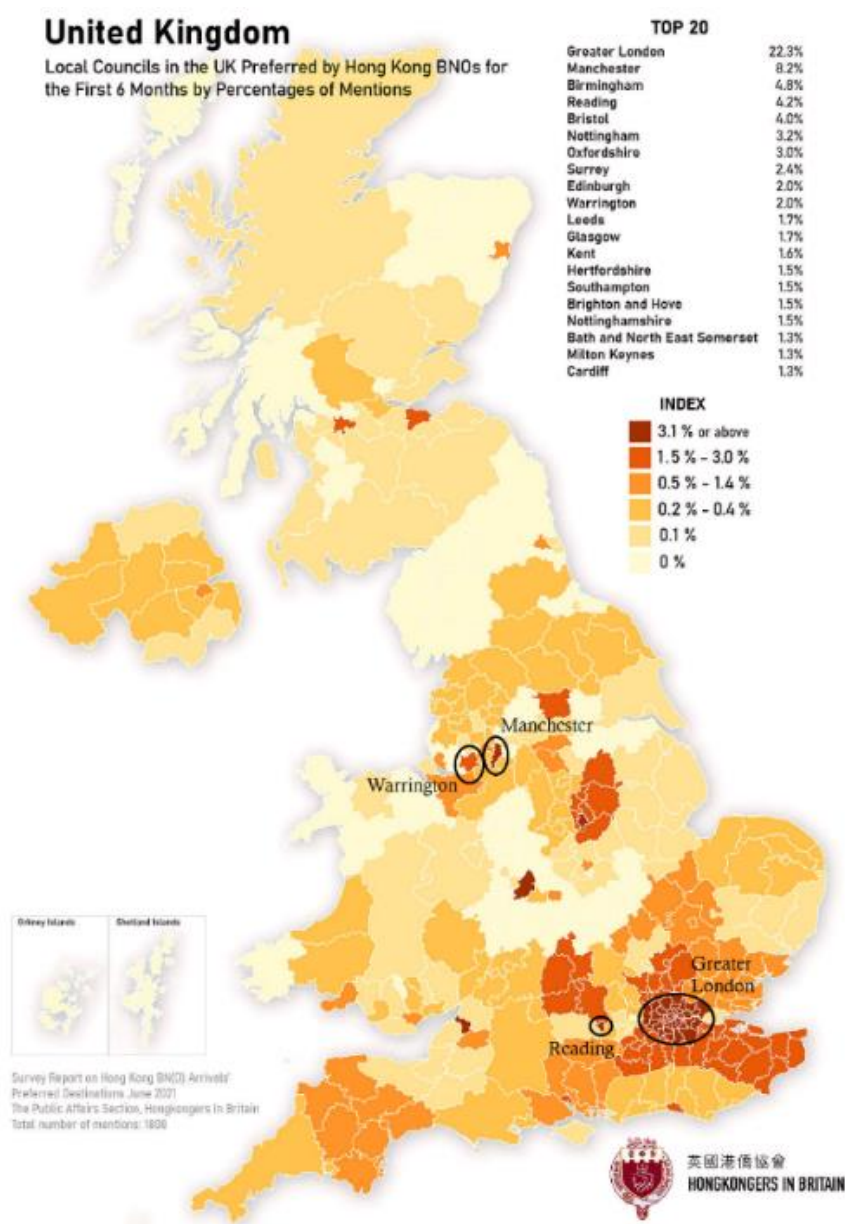
Source: HKB (2021), with author's annotations.

In a more micro sense, for each participant, the research was carried in a multi-sited manner. More information about my participants will be introduced in the next section. Here I would like to explain how the research was conducted.

The technique of "follow the people" (Marcus, 1995) in multi-sited ethnography was considered and adopted. Deriving from such technique, I established two main methods to study the lives of BN(O) migrants, namely "living-in" and "following". In the "living-in" method, I resided with my participants for 3 to 7 days. I participated in nearly every aspect of their daily routines, including but not limited to grocery shopping, meal preparation, attending church, joining friends' gatherings, and participating in family dinners.[7] This immersive approach enabled me to experience the lives of my participants on a daily basis, yielding numerous observations and unstructured interviews.

Taking meal preparation as an example. Participating in this daily activity with my participants allows me to observe the way that they obtain ingredients - some from supermarkets, some from apps like "Too Good to Go," some from wholesalers (which also involve the act of pooling resources with friends to purchase items in bulk in the latter case). All of this reveals various facets of their migration life, such as budget concerns and communal life. During cooking, I also observed habits like conserving water from washing vegetables for toilet flushing and making deliberate attempts to minimise utensil usage to ensure everything fit into the dishwasher in one round. These actions conveys their concerns even without verbal expression. Additionally, the dishes they cook or crave always reflect Hong Kong's multicultural background. All of the above had sparked meaningful discussions between me and my participants.

Initially, I planned to conduct my research solely through the "living-in" method because it can generate richer data. However, certain constraints faced by my participants prevented me from "living-in" with them. Therefore, I adopted "following" as an alternative method. With the "following" method, we meet at a location chosen by my participants for an unstructured interview, then go to some places they usually go to and visit their homes for a quick observation if the situation allows.

In addition to these two main methods, several participatory observations were carried out. These included participating in webinars organised by community interest companies set up by Hong Kongers targeting BN(O) migrants, attending church worships, as well as joining some Facebook groups where Hong Kongers share information related to migrating to the UK and living there. These observations were carried out before, during and also after my fieldwork to supplement me with information related to my research.

Besides actively collecting data through these three methods, I also paid attention to "whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3). This included some information that I learned from my participants before they participated in my research. It is important to stress that all the information presented in this paper has obtained their verbal consent.

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[7] For the details of my interaction with my participants, see Appendix III.

2.2.2 About the Participants

One may notice that the "living-in" method is intrusive in nature – the researcher is in fact invading into the private space of the participants by residing with them and following their daily routines, it requires a high degree of mutual trust between the participants and the researcher. Therefore, instead of recruiting participants publicly, I decided to contact people that I have developed a good rapport before.

As a result, the majority of my participants are my friends I made at different occasions. One of the participants is my primary and secondary school classmate. She also invited her parents to participate when I was "following" her, as she believed they would have more to say, given the decision to migrate was solely made by her parents. Four of them are friends that I made during my undergraduate studies. Seven of them are friends that I made during my career as a journalist – five out of the seven were journalist, and two are their partners. Most of the participants mentioned above fall within the target age group for this research, except for the parents who were invited to participate by my friend.

However, one group of my participants, consisting of one child who aged 15 and two adults who are in their mid-40s, are quite distinct in terms of age in this research. I have conducted private tutorial class for the child for around 2 years in Hong Kong. In 2021, when they planned to migrate to the UK, I continued with the private tutorials until two weeks before their departure. This has provided me with the opportunity to witness how they prepared for their move, including tasks like getting a TB test, packing and sending their belongings, scanning old photos into the computer, selling their flat, and relocating to a property owned by their relatives. I considered these observations to be valuable data that shed light on the uncertainties faced by BN(O) migrants before their departure. Moreover, I would also like to get insights from their life in the UK, which is why I included them in my sample.[8]

Probably due to the rapport that I have developed with my participant before, I did not face any rejections when I contacted them for this research. But still, there were questions and concerns. For instance, two of my participants worried that they would not be a "good participant" as they do not self-identified as "typical migrant". Some were curious about my research method: despite I had explained to them in my text messages beforehand, at the moment when I arrived their place, they would still ask whether there were something that they "*needed to do for my research*". While for some, they expressed their concerns over my safety for doing research with them given their sensitive political identity, and I also shared their concerns about their safety too.

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[8] For the profile of my participants, see Appendix II.

2.2.3 Researching with Friends – A Reflection on Positionality and Ethics

The last paragraph raises important issues related to research: positionality and ethics. When my participants asked if they needed to "do" something for my research, it reminded me about my positionality. Despite identifying myself as an "insider" – a Hong Konger who speaks the same language (Cantonese), shares the same culture, experiences the same anxiety from the changing political environment, and has similar relocation experiences – I am still an "outsider" in their eyes. I am someone who is "researching on" them, at least before I entered the field.

This dynamic had shifted slightly as I entered the field, with my participants perceiving me more as a "friend" than a "researcher". Thus, I have "regained" my "insider" position, and it is an even more intimate one. This change had both advantages and challenges. On one hand, it facilitated my data collection, as my participants were more open up to personal stories and brought me into research sites that were exclusive in nature, such as church gatherings, friends' gatherings, or family dinners involving participants' parents, siblings, and extended family. On the other hand, it required me to maintain a constant dialogue with them, ensuring that I received their consent before including certain information in my research paper. As a result, sometimes in the middle of a conversation – even when we were having meals together, I would suddenly take out my sketchbook and asked, "Would it be okay if I make a note of this?". If they agreed, I would begin writing in front of them. I did the same when I wanted to take a picture of something, either by asking explicitly or by taking out my phone in front of them and said, "Let me take a picture of this". These actions might sound awkward, but they are deliberate cues that I added to seek for their consent and remind them of my identity as a researcher. I planned not to record anything if participants showed any hesitancy when I asked. Luckily, such situations did not occur. These actions not only did not compromise my research but also created an atmosphere in which my participants feel safe to participate.

However, the challenges of researching with friends did not end there. As pointed out by Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013), the "emotional involvement" when researching with friends became a recurring theme throughout my data gathering and writing process. The life stories of my participants are emotionally heavy, and the impact of these emotionally laden stories became even more pronounced when the participants are my friends. Here, I will illustrate one of these stories with a short extract from my fieldnotes. This participant is one of the three who identified himself as being in "*forced exile*" in the UK. His family members came to the UK with him but later found themselves unable to adapt to the life there and were planning to return.

The conversation below starts when I asked about his social networks here.

"I would say at this moment, I don't have any friends in Manchester…I feel quite lonely here. I won't share that much with people that I met here. Everyone is busy with their own life," he replied.

Then, he continued to express his grievance, but at the same time, guilt towards his parents. He also talked more about his "plan" towards his future.

"If you (referring to his father) lack confidence, why did you lie to me in the first place? My life is already derailed, how can I handle all of your complaints? ... I'm overwhelmed by negative feelings about my future. So, if they want to return to Hong Kong, it might be better for them to do so…I mean, it's better to die alone than three of us die together."

After saying that, he paused a little bit and went out of the bar for a cigarette. As he returned, he continued,

"You know, people often say that romantic relationships, careers and family are important pillars of life. I broke up last year, and my family is planning to return to Hong Kong. Is it worth for me to cling to a career flooded with uncertainties? I don't think I will stay (in the world) anymore after my family go back. You know what I meant, right?"

"Yes…" I replied. Given his previous mentioning about his suicide attempt in the UK a few months ago, yes, I know what that means. I could not come up with any single word at that point, so I suggested we go out to smoke.

After smoking, we decided to walk back to our place. On the way, I asked further about his suicide plan as an attempt to gather more information if any further actions is needed in the future. I also proposed a further meet up to hang out as a way to engage him in some commitment – which could be a useful strategy in suicide prevention based on my personal experience.

Before we went separately at a junction, he asked me, "You won't call around to find people to rescue me, right?". At that point, I made a difficult decision in a few seconds. "No worries, I won't," I answered. "Glad that you are those who understand what suicide is. See you on Thursday then, I won't commit suicide before that," he smiled and replied.

(One participant, July 2023; Author's field notes)

This conversation still hits me whenever I revisit it. The information itself is heavy, and it reminds me a little bit too much about my past. In addition to that, the dual role demands of "friend" and "researcher" has often been a source of inner conflict for me especially when I was at the field. As a researcher, I was conscious of the need to maintain a certain distance and not interfere excessively, given the purpose of me to adopt an ethnographic-oriented approach is to study their lived experiences as closely as possible from their original perspectives. However, as a friend, I sometimes felt that I wasn't doing enough to provide emotional support at the spot.

This kind of inner conflict was also discussed in various scholarly works including Taylor (2011) and Owton and Allen-Collinson (2013). Both articles highlights the advantages and challenges which I have experienced in this research. Despite the challenges and emotional labour involved, I still agree with the authors that this approach can be beneficial in providing valuable and unique insights from a "intimate insider view". However, it is also important to remind myself or researchers who would like to adopt this approach to be self-critique, reflexive,

and to "value and rely upon our strength of character, goodwill, our gut instincts and emotional intelligence" (Taylor, 2011, p.18) when researching with friends.

2.2.4 Data Handling and Processing – The Challenges Within

Researching with friends, particularly those with politically sensitive identities, also posed unique challenges related to data handling and processing. To ensure their privacy and anonymity, I used pseudonyms and refrained from revealing certain personal data, such as their exact ages and living locations in this paper. To further enhance their safety, I did not use audio recording devices during our interactions. Instead, I relied on handwritten notes.

Acknowledging that handwritten notes would not be able to capture every piece of information, I typed out my field notes on a nightly basis throughout the duration of my fieldwork. During this process, I redacted personal and sensitive information, and also translated the dialogues which originally conducted in Cantonese and English into English.

To analyse the data, I employed an open coding approach. I printed out all the field notes, using different colours to categories the experiences according to different themes, and develop different code names accordingly. The process of "tacking" was involved in this process – I move in my analysis between theory and empirical data which "often reshapes our theoretical ideas as well as our view of the empirical data" (Cerwonka, 2007, p.15).

This process consumes a lot of time and energy – especially with the emotional labour involved in processing those emotionally heavy stories of my friends. Therefore, this process was conducted in an on-and-off manner. Several breaks were taken in the middle of my analysis to allow room for myself to regain critical distance with the data, as well as taking care of myself.

Chapter 3: Unravelling Uncertainty: The Waiting Challenge for BN(O) Status Holders in the Initial Stages

After detailing the theoretical framework and methodology in the previous chapter, the upcoming chapters are going to present the findings. This chapter delves into the migration experiences of BN(O) status holders during their initial stages to examine how state efforts to create a certain level of certainty unintentionally result in uncertainty.

3.1 Introduction: State attempts to Create Certainty

To begin, I must acknowledge that the two historical events mentioned in Chapter 1, placing Hong Kongers in uncertainty, can be viewed as efforts by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments to establish a certain level of certainty within the socio-political environment in Hong Kong. Paradoxically, these attempts at certainty led to the creation of further uncertainty.

The UK's BN(O) visa scheme, unfortunately, bears similarities in this sense. The scheme was delivered to Hong Kongers at a time when they were experiencing radical uncertainty in their homeland. The design of the scheme, similar to visa schemes for economic migrants, shall be able to reduce uncertainty – in contrast to the pathways that refugees or political asylum go through. However, I will demonstrate that this isn't true, and highlighting issues related to policy design in the discussion section.

3.2 Waiting for the Scheme to be Launched – Max and Emily's Story

In June 2020, the UK government announced that they have a plan to provide a settlement route for BN(O) status holders from Hong Kong. However, some people, like Max and his wife Emily cannot wait until the scheme to be launched, due to the abrupt changes in political situation in Hong Kong. In view of someone doing similar work was arrested, Max and Emily decided to embark their journey to the UK within 24 hours after that arrest was made.

On that day, after learning the news, they immediately sought the earliest available flight to leave Hong Kong. Due to reduced flights during COVID-19 and the surge in demand for flight tickets from other Hong Kongers triggered by the same event, they struggled to secure tickets for that flight. Fortunately, while browsing the Asia Miles redemption page, they managed to secure the last two available tickets for that flight. They started packing immediately. Within 24 hours, they were on their way to the UK.

> "Actually, I was suffering from insomnia since 2019. The chains of event happened were
> really stressful to me. I wanted to leave by then, but he (Max) did not want to, so we
> delayed our plans several times, from March 2020 to July 2020. At that time (June 2020),

I thought that I still had around one month to farewell and prepare for our departure, like closing our bank account and all other stuff. I was even helping his parents to pack their things. But things happened, so within 24 hours, we have to leave." (Emily, July 2023; Author's translation)

Emily recalled the whole event to me one day after breakfast when I was living in with them. She even told me that as the decision was made in late night, and they needed to grasp the time in packing, so they even had to borrow suitcases from their relatives. That event, was like "*fleeing*" for her, left her with insomnia.

That incident, coupled with the enactment of NSL, was similar to what Xiang, et al. (2022) describe as "shock mobility" to them and to the Hong Kong community. After that, the migratory routines are "radically and abruptly reconfigured" (p.2). The scale and intensity of migration has increased drastically. From 2020 to 2021, 89 200 people has left Hong Kong, almost 4 times than the year before (Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR, 2022). While the meaning of migration also changed. In the past, Hong Kongers tended return to Hong Kong after getting the settlement status in another country (Skeldon, 1994) – we even have the term "astronauts" to describe them. However, this time, some of them are treating their new destinations as their "*homeland*"[9].

Back to Emily and Max, their situation had not gotten better after their arrival. At the time when they arrived, the BN(O) visa scheme had not yet launched. Max was granted LOTR to reside and work for 6 months in the UK, but they were not sure what their next step would be – the only thing that they knew at that time was they cannot return to Hong Kong. This created a "precarious status" to Max which profoundly affects their day-to-day lives. Similar with research conducted by Villegas (2014) which migrant with precarious status could not even buy a bed because she did not know if she had to leave tomorrow, they could not rent a flat. They stayed in an Airbnb for the first few months after their arrival and renewed the rental contract month by month. In the meanwhile, they continued to explore other possibilities including obtaining working visa in the US.

Concluding that period, Emily made a remark, "*There are so many unknowns, so many uncertainties, and all these make me nervous*".

3.3 Waiting to be "Qualified" for the Scheme – Leo's Experience

Emily and Max, at least, know that they will qualify for a BN(O) visa sooner or later. However, this is not the case for Leo. Leo was born in September 1997, around three months after July 1, 1997. Consequently, he does not possess his own BN(O) passport, but his parents do. He wished to go to the UK because he foresaw that his work at that time might cause future troubles for him. However, his parents have no plans to migrate. Both of them are in their 60s and quite settled in Hong Kong. Since "children 18 or older" but do not possess BN(O) passports are initially required to apply with the main applicants (Home Office, 2023a), all he can do is hope for the UK government to amend the scheme.

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[9] This phrase came up during the family dinner with Emily's family. When we were toasting, her father said, "now, we are in a foreign land…no, we can no longer treat here as a foreign land. It is our homeland now" (July 2023; Author's translation).

"There have been continuous rumours suggesting that amendments will be made to the scheme, allowing household members to apply independently. Initially, the rumours indicated that the amendment would be made in mid-2022. Later, people said it would be announced in the third quarter of the year. I can only wait and hope that such an amendment will be made at that time. Otherwise, I will have to plan everything again." (Leo, July 2023; Author's translation)

Having maintained close contact with Leo during that period in Hong Kong, I also recalled how stressful the waiting period was for him – he was suffering from nightmares, with specific details that included his fear of the UK government not making any amendments to the scheme. On 29th November 2022, the date when there are news report confirming the UK government would announce such amendment soon, he could not sleep at all.

Eventually, the announcement was made on 30th November 2022. As soon as Leo learned about the amendment, he promptly filled in the application form and submitted it within two hours. In the end, he received his BN(O) visa in January 2023.

Leo's experience shows an interesting example of how "childhood is formally institutionalized" (Huijsman, 2011, p.1313). Under the formal structure of citizenship regimes, his agency as an "youth" or even "adult" - no matter in chronological age, or in a relative approach, has been reduced to a "child", lacking agency in family migration.

3.4 Waiting for the Unknown Processing Time – Ryan, Leo and the stories of more

Despite the UK government website now stated that a decision will be made usually made within 12 weeks (60 working days) from the date of application, this standard was not officially introduced until February 2022, more than one year after the scheme was launched.

One of my participants, Ryan, shared the experience of his friend who applied for a BN(O) visa in the summer of 2021 – it took more than a year for her application to be approved, and in the meanwhile, she did not hear anything from the Home Office. She felt like her application had fallen into an "*administration black hole*".

Her case is not an isolated case. Data obtained by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) indicated that from 31 January 2021 to 30 April 2022, the average time for applications from overseas took 65 days to process; while for in-country applications, it took 87 days (Neal, 2022).

As of May 2022, more than 600 adult dependent applicants were still awaiting the results of their applications. Among these cases, the earliest one was submitted on January 31, 2021, meaning that the applicant had been waiting for 16 months for a decision (ibid.).

In addition to the waiting time after applicants submitted their applications, there are more waits throughout the entire application process. One aspect that presented unexpected challenges to the applicants is obtaining the TB test certificate. This test must be conducted at a clinic approved by the Home Office, and there are only 12 such clinics in Hong Kong. Securing an appointment for the test was particularly difficult at that time, given the large number of

people planning to migrate. In 2021, some applicants had to wait for 3 to 4 months for the test. This largely disrupted their plans, especially for those who planned to migrate with their children before the new school year started. For Leo, whom I mentioned in the above section, he underwent multiple TB tests throughout the period of his wait, just to ensure he holds a valid TB certificate when the amendment was announced.

The situation depicted above actually demonstrated how "mobilities and immobilities are entangled with one another" (Gutekunst et al., 2016). Despite BN(O) visa scheme creates mobility for BN(O) status holders to migrate in a more regular pathway on one hand, it also created immobility for some at least for a certain period of time. For those who are waiting for approval of the visa, or just waiting to do the TB test, they are being held up in the process and can only wait. They are thus being entrapped within the migration regime.

3.5 Discussion

In this chapter, I have presented some cases that illustrate the unpredictability inherent in the implementation of the BN(O) visa scheme. These cases reveal how state efforts to create a sense of certainty can inadvertently lead to further uncertainty.

BN(O) visa scheme, on one hand, can be view as an attempt for the UK government to provide a relatively more certain pathway for BN(O) status holders. At the same time, this scheme can also be viewed as an attempt for the UK government to maintain control over the potential influx of migrants to the UK, i.e., to create a sense certainty in the UK society too. This is evident in the Impact Assessment conducted by the Home Office (2020b), which aimed to estimate application volumes, economic costs, and benefits associated with opening the route.

However, the Home Office also concluded that:

> Estimating the volume of BN(O) inflows is challenging due to the wide range of drivers which themselves can be inherently uncertain. Not all potential impacts have been fully quantified and included in the Net Present Social Value (NPSV) of this policy and where they have, they are subject to significant uncertainty. (Home Office, 2020b, p.1)

This highlights that no one, not even those responsible for implementing the scheme, possesses "perfect knowledge" about its outcomes. The Home Office could only provide estimates and make references to similar schemes and lessons learned from recent initiatives, such as the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS), which allowed European Union citizens to settle in the UK after Brexit (Neal, 2022).

This touches upon the matter of "lesson drawing" and/or "policy transfer", which "have become increasingly influential ways of understanding public policy, especially in the UK" (James and Lodge, 2003, p.179). From the report by ICIBI, which also reviewed the design of the BN(O) visa scheme, some adjustments was made according to the lessons learnt in launching the

EUSS, for example a digital BN(O) application route has been introduced as "people like to make applications usually evenings and weekends, outside of office hours, which is a direct equivalent of the EUSS" (Neal, 2022, p.14). The "lesson drawing" in this case, put a greater focus of practicalities of launching a new immigration route.

However, the "policy transfer" from other migration routes to the one in this case may not be deemed appropriate, considering the unique context of BN(O) migrants. Many of them face radical uncertainty due to the changing political situation in Hong Kong. While the UK government granted the LOTR as a way to mitigate the urgency for those who needed to leave and the time required to formulate the route, it still resulted in a period of waiting. As shown in Max and Emily's case, the LOTR merely shifted the location of waiting from Hong Kong to the UK. At the same time, it created a precarious status for Max, making it difficult for him and his wife to plan their next steps. One cannot deny that it did provide some relief from the uncertainty they left behind, but it also invited further uncertainties.

Indeed, the UK government conducts extensive calculations before implementing the scheme to anticipate various scenarios. Nevertheless, there are critical elements missing from these calculations. For instance, the rationale for allowing BN(O) household members to apply, based on the desire not to "split family units where there are dependent children over the age of 18 years" (Home Office, 2020b, p.3), overlooks the fact that some families in Hong Kong were already divided in 2019 due to differing political opinions. This rationale also disregards the agency of "dependent children", creating a cohort of BN(O) status holders like Leo, who had to navigate a complex and anxious waiting period.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the availability of TB test time slots at approved clinics. This seemingly minor detail posed barrier for mobility and inject unwarranted uncertainty into the application process. Surprisingly, this issue has not appeared in any Impact Assessment Report or the ICIBI's findings. Through the cases of BN(O) migrants, it becomes evident that omissions or miscalculations, regardless of their scale, can significantly influence their "customer journey", further intensifying the already high levels of uncertainty they face.

Even though the time for delivering the new immigration route has been reduced to six months, one should note that there is a considerable disparity between this "social framings of time" and the "human experiences of time" (Jacobsen, Karlsen and Khosravi, 2020). Especially in the context of Hong Kong, where freedom and rights retreated rapidly[10], any period of waiting can generate psychological stress, as illustrated in Emily and Leo's case.

In such circumstances, individuals are often left with no choice but to rely on "hope" to sustain themselves throughout this turbulent journey. Echoing Horst and Grabska (2015), "hope" serves an essential emotional tool for them to navigate the unpredictable immigration process and maintaining some kind of control in a situation characterised by constant uncertainty.

To sum up, this chapter points out the unpredictability of the BN(O) visa scheme. It has demonstrated that government efforts to provide certainty can paradoxically give rise to further uncertainties. This dynamic is observable not only in the case of the BN(O) visa scheme, but

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[10] See Appendix I.

also in the enactment of the NSL and the manner in which both the UK and Chinese governments have handled the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong. The top-down approach to policy implementation, lengthy planning periods characterised by rumours and uncertainty, and inaccurate calculations are recurring themes in all three of these occurrences.

The next chapter will delve into the everyday life experiences of these individuals in the UK, further illuminating the challenges they faced as they embarked on their new lives in the UK.

Chapter 4: Uncertainties in Everyday Life in UK: Uprooted and Awaiting Rootedness

> "Sometimes it feels like all of a sudden, you have to give up everything, even your dignity. It is just difficult to build up anything after one migrates. You will need to worry about whether your landlord will renew your tenancy agreement with you, and you will need to worry about whether you will still just get the minimum wage 6 years later. It feels like I am being stuck in a 'rootless' situation – can only go with the flow but not being grounded." (Ryan, July 2023; Author's translation)

As Ryan was driving me home in the end of my "following" journey with him, he shared his feelings with me. Throughout our whole day conversation, he had mentioned at least five times the word "*無常*" (impermanence). Despite most of the time he put "*已經習慣*" (already used to) in front of impermanence, I still had reservations about whether he was really used to it. Especially events that happened in the UK to him – like suddenly kicked out by his flatmates, completely disrupted his original planning. But one thing that I am sure is - "impermanence" is not something pleasant that he enjoyed. Same do my participants. Among my participants, numerous events in the UK are beyond their control which add uncertainties into their daily lives. And of course, they do not enjoy that.

This chapter explores the uncertainties faced by BN(O) individuals as they "put down their roots" (Home Office, 2020a, p.1) in the UK. It examines uncertainties in financial matters, housing, access to the public services and interpersonal relationships. The analysis discusses how these uncertainties are developed and exacerbated, considering factors such as cultural differences, age and family dynamics.

4.1 *"We don't deserve entertainment."* – Speaking about Financial Insecurity

"*As someone who don't have financial stability, we don't deserve entertainment,*" Mia said during my visit to the place where she lived with her unmarried partner, Lucas. This statement appeared twice as we were chatting.

In mid-July 2022, Mia and Lucas began their journey to the UK, carrying all of their savings - £100,000 with them, £50,000 each. They anticipated that this amount would be sufficient for both of them to sustain their lives in the UK for one year, even if they were unable to secure employment during the first year. As Lucas has practical skills, he managed to secure a job in a salon. For Mia, she embarked on her master's degree program, which she considered a crucial stepping stone for securing employment in the UK. Unfortunately, the institute considered her status as international student, so she had to pay a tuition fee of £18,000. As a full-time student, she was unable to undertake a full-time job. Therefore, she relied on freelance job as her source of income. Her income was unstable, whereas she faced monthly fixed expenses, which included £1300 in rent and living costs of approximately £1000 per month. For

Lucas, despite he is employed, but the salary was insufficient for him to have any monthly savings.

As a result, they significantly reduced their entertainment expenses. Dining out became a rare treat, occurring only once every two months. They also avoided peak-hour travel to minimize transportation costs. Additionally, they frequently stayed at their school or workplace until late to reduce their electricity expenses. To ensure efficient financial planning, they maintained detailed records of every expenditure – saving all the receipts and entered them to a mobile app. Figure 4.1 shows a basket of receipts that placed in the middle of the living room in Mia's place. The location of the basket, together with some receipts are carefully labelled with "Groceries", "Hotpot" etc., signifying these practices actually played a central role in their daily experience.

Figure 4.1
Basket of receipts that placed in the middle of the living room in Mia's Place

Source: Fieldwork 2023.

Study has confirmed that a crucial factor in determining the amount of precautionary savings is uncertainty about future income and legal status in the case of immigrants (Piracha and Zhu, 2011). The urge to have some precautionary savings by reducing expenses is predominant in the cases of BN(O) migrants. For instance, Ethan, currently working under a 0.6 FTE contract with uncertainties regarding whether that contract would eventually become a 1.0 FTE contract, will carefully assess the cost of frozen food per portion at the supermarket before making purchases. He strives to keep his meal expenses below £3, deeming anything beyond that as "*luxurious*". Consequently, his dinner choice often falls upon McDonald's, as he discovered that by completing surveys printed on receipts, he can get a discount code, allowing him to purchase a burger and fries for £1.99. Despite that, he told me that he could hardly save even £100 per month.

For Olivia, Alex and Sophia, the family that I mentioned when introducing my participants, how to reduce expenses is a recurring theme in their daily lives. Within the family, only Alex secures a full-time job, while Olivia works part-time as a lunch supervisor, and Sophia continues her studies as a student. Therefore, they seldom dine out, they actively seek for second hand free furniture, they collect rainwater and water used when taking a shower for flushing (Figure 4.2), and they only address repairs in their apartment when it is deemed absolutely essential.

Figure 4.2
Buckets that Olivia's family use to collect water during shower

Source: Fieldwork 2023.

From the three cases above, it becomes apparent that the feeling of financial insecurity is closely tied to their employment status thus their future income, a factor largely beyond their immediate control. It was not solely an individual problem, but also has its policy and cultural dimension. From an employment seminar organised by Hongkonger in Britain (2023), the speaker pointed out that one particular example is the matter of the National Insurance (NI) Number. In the UK, citizens receive this number upon reaching adulthood, signifying the right to work. However, for BN(O) visa holders, they must undergo a separate application process. This distinction leads to a perception among British citizens that not possessing the NI number implies a lack of working rights in the country.

"*Cultural differences*" in employment practices are equally impactful (ibid.). These include the difference in the format of interview and CV-writing skills. Such disparities, even at the level of a person's name – where the surname placement differs from Chinese conventions – can pose substantial challenges for BN(O) migrants in the UK. The uncertainty related to their employability is profoundly shaped by this multifaceted interplay of individual, policy, and cultural factors, while there are limited channels for them to know about such information.

Regarding their legal status, as they are not yet British citizens, they still need to pay for the Life in UK Test and application fees for ILR and BC in the future. According to Home Office (2023c), it costed £4141 as of October 2023. While this sum can still be subject to change, and it has already changed once. The application fee for ILR has increased from £2,404 to £2,885 in October 2023. The UK government explained that such an increase is important to fund public sector pay rises in the UK (Home Office, 2023c). However, for BN(O) migrants, this undoubtedly adds uncertainty and burden to them – particularly for young migrants like Mia, Lucas, and Ethan, who find it challenging to save any money on top of their living costs.

4.2 *"I don't want to go through that torture again."* – Challenges in Searching for Accommodation

Searching for accommodation is challenging, especially when the housing condition in the UK remains unknown for them before their arrival. According to my participants, the primary source for them to obtain information before their departure was Facebook groups, which, ironically, also contained numerous posts about housing scams.

To avoid scammers, many of them opt to arrive first and search for accommodation upon arrival, unless they had relatives or friends in the UK who could assist with viewing apartments. However, securing accommodation is not easy in a country with a housing supply shortage since 1947 (Watling and Breach, 2023), along with factors like income insecurity of BN(O) migrants, as discussed in the last section; the lack of housing support provided to migrants, as identified by Lombard (2021); and the soaring rental prices in the private rental sector due to the neoliberal practices of the UK government since the 1980s (Hoolachan et al., 2016; Watt, 2020).

Some of my participants shared with me their "*torturing*" experiences in searching for accommodation. No matter in London or Manchester, their experiences are similar: when they first arrived, they lived in Airbnb temporarily – normally they would book for 3 weeks to 1 month, but in the end all of them needed to extend their stay to at least 2 months. Each morning, they had to rise early, around 8 am, to check estate agencies' websites for flat availability. When a listing appeared, they needed to call the agency immediately to arrange flat viewing or even making the down payment on the same day. Any delay in calling meant their chance to get a flat has gone and they needed to try again the next morning. For some, calling as fast as they could was insufficient. Some property owners demanded more, such as a personal statement, or in Mia and Lucas's case, insisted on prepayment of one year's rent upfront due to their employment precarity. My participants mentioned that it took them about 1 to 2 weeks to "*adapt to this cultural difference*". During the searching process, they couldn't plan or schedule anything in advance because they never knew when they might have the opportunity for a sudden flat viewing. This level of uncertainty added to the challenges of their migration experience.

Renting a flat posed its own set of problems – rental contracts will eventually end, and they have to restart the search process repeatedly until they secure more permanent accommodations. This put them in the status of "recurrent displacement" – a status of "forced moves that people living in temporary accommodation have experienced" (Watt, 2018, p.73-74). This situation is different from Hong Kong, especially for the youth, where some can still live in their parents' flats if needed. However, in the UK, failing to find a flat could potentially lead to homelessness.

Besides, the temporalities of accommodation also affected their planning in various aspects. Lucas, for instance, was in the process of learning English from scratch through an English course offered by their local council. If they have to move to a different area, he will have to join a new waiting list for an English course, which can take a considerable amount of time, as not all local councils offered courses tailored to BN(O) migrants. Mastery of the English

language is vital for their ability to navigate life in the UK, making these uncertainties a central aspect of their experience.

For those who want to have a permanent accommodation, negotiations are made between them and their family members, much like Ryan's situation. He borrowed money from his family to purchase a flat. In return, the flat he purchased contains an extra bedroom – to cater for the need if his parents want to migrate in the future. This speaks to the issue of a "renegotiation of intergenerational contract" (Croll, 2006) with I would delve deeper into in the discussion section of this chapter.

4.3 *"It is special."* – Encounter with Public Services

Regarding their encounter with public services, some participants used *"stupid"* or, in a more British manner of expression, *"special"* when describing the experiences.

> "There is a lack of consistency in everything. Just like when we wanted to receive the third dose of COVID-19 vaccine - initially they did not allow us to inject the third dose, as we didn't have the vaccination record issued here in the UK. However, so many Hong Kong people shared their experience online, and I discovered that if you insist, the staff will let go. I also discovered that despite we had uploaded everything to NHS, including our medical record, the record was still missing – until we went to our GP for the first time. It is just stupid." (Alex, July 2023; Author's translation)

The lack of consistency was exhibited in the case of Thomas as well, who required mental health support as he is still suffering from Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the 2019 Hong Kong protest.

> "Every time when I go to the outpatient psychiatrist treatment, the psychiatrist that I meet is different. I have to tell my story again and again and traumatised myself again and again. Despite I have already used to it, it is still a little bit too much for me." (Thomas, August 2023; Author's translation)

Mental health support is crucial in the case of forced migration. Research has confirmed that immigrants are vulnerable to risk factors for mental health issues, mainly associated with exposure to traumatic and stressful events (Bustamante et al., 2017). In the case of BN(O) migrants, survey by HKB (2022) showed that 18.9% and 25.8% of them have clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression respectively, as defined by the NHS. 23.8% of them have clinically significant symptoms of PTSD in relation to the 2019 Hong Kong Protests and the enforcement of NSL. Among my participants, at least six of them have mentioned to me that they are having some sort of mental health issues. Therefore, Thomas' experience with the outpatient psychiatrist treatment actually signifies a worrying situation - mental health

practitioners in the UK may lack the necessary training to recognise and treat posttraumatic and/or stress-related problems among migrants.

Apart from mental health support, he also commented on the way that the UK police handling some incidents. For some cases, like minor car accident or theft, police will just send the victim reference number for them to claim the insurance.

> "People at risk are needed to deal with something that they didn't need to deal with in the past when they encountered the same situation in Hong Kong. It is how special the life here is." (Thomas, August 2023; Author's translation)

These cases demonstrate that the inconsistency, both within the public services offered by different UK departments and compare to what they were used to in Hong Kong, has introduced a sense of uncertainty into their daily lives. They have to "*discover*" this tacit knowledge on their own while using these services.

4.4 *"We are not that close."* – Distance in Interpersonal Relationship

Social networks have been recognized by scholars in various contexts as playing a crucial role in knowledge transfer and creation (Allen, James, and Gamlen, 2007; Nieves and Osorio, 2013). Therefore, for migrants, establishing social networks is essential for accessing information that they may not be familiar with, helping them to gain a sense of security and understanding in their current society. Ironically, the establishment of social networks has also been affected by the uncertainties that BN(O) migrants are experiencing.

For instance, Max and Emily noted that they are not having a "*normal communal life*" yet. The main reason is they are "*uncertain about if we are going to the US instead, or do we need to move to another community*".

The sense of uncertainty and impermanence intensifies in the case of my youngest participant, Sophia. As a school-aged child, she consciously avoids forming close friendships to mitigate potential separation anxiety.

I still can recall that one day during dinner, as Olivia observed that Sophia was quite happy about my presence in their family, she asked Sophia whether she would like to invite her classmates to sleepover too, as she thought that would make Sophia happy. Out of her expectations, Sophia answered, "*No, we are not that close*". Olivia thought Sophia was too shy to invite. I was curious about the reason behind, so I chatted with her about this after dinner. She told me that she felt there was no point to make friends at this stage, as it is common for Hong Kong parents to change the school for their children after several months of their arrival. Therefore, "*friends will just leave*", like what she has experienced back then in Hong Kong.

As Gutekunst et al. (2016) pointed out, "a life that is defined by somewhat involuntary mobility especially hampers the construction and maintenance of stable social networks" (p.88). In the cases of Max and Emily, as well as Sophia, their mobility is "somewhat involuntary". Max and Emily migrated under political pressure, while Sophia, lacking agency as a "child" to decide on whether migrate or not. Their personal experiences of a sudden alteration in interpersonal relationship, coupled with the uncertainties surrounding potential relocations, create a context where establishing enduring relationships becomes a challenging undertaking for them.

4.5 Discussion

Due to space limitations, the above sections categorised the experiences of my participants into various aspects of their daily lives. However, it is important to note that different issues are often interconnected. For example, in the case of accommodation, Lucas's experience demonstrates its connection to employability. In the cases of Max and Emily and Olivia, even though I categorised them under "distance in interpersonal relationships", the uncertainty regarding accommodation – specifically, whether they or their friends would have to relocate – significantly influences this aspect of their lives.

From the examples in this chapter, one could notice that apart from the uncertainties in four aspects – financial instability, limited control in housing situation, inconsistency in public services, and distance in interpersonal relationships – that I have highlighted, the interplay between cultural differences, family dynamics, and age also stands out, further complicating the situation that BN(O) migrants are facing.

"Cultural", defined by Tylor (2016), refers to "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Based on this definition, one can notice that culture is exclusive in nature which newcomers to that society, needed to "*discover*", learn and "*adapt*". Some elements on this list, let say "law", can be regarded as "explicit knowledge" which are "stored and shared using manuals and databases" (Connell, Klein and Powell, 2003, p.141) thus it is easier for migrants to access.

However, a significant part of culture consists of "tacit knowledge" which is "associated with experience" (ibid.), making it much more difficult to store and distribute. Let say for the "cultural difference" in employment that spotted out by HKB, the speaker who delivered the webinar has been serving as the Employment Coordinator of HKB for two years and have handled a lot of cases related to labour disputes of BN(O) migrants in the UK. Therefore, he is more "experienced" and managed to distribute such knowledge through this platform. However, these webinars have limited quotas and do not allow any form of recording, preventing the information from being stored and redistributed to a broader audience. For instance, when I asked Olivia if she knew about these webinars and the information, she told me she did not.

As newcomers to new societies, BN(O) migrants can only learn bit by bit through their own experiences, often through trial and error in various aspects such as job seeking or accommodation searching, or from the experiences of others, like what Alex learned online

about getting the third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Establishing social networks, thus, is an important step for them to avoid making too many errors by themselves, as they can take reference from others' experiences. Ironically, the establishment of social networks, as illustrated in Max and Emily's and Olivia's cases, is disrupted by the uncertainties they are facing. This disruption can potentially impact them in various areas.

While BN(O) migrants are dealing with the challenges in making sense of the culture in the new societies that they are currently living, they also carry with them the cultural influences from the Hong Kong society with them, such as the social meanings attached to age and family. Such dual cultural influences, attached to the muti facets of their identity – migrants, adult, child of a family etc., has create a unique and complex set of challenges for BN(O) young migrants.

For instance, in the cases of Mia, Lucas, Ethan, and several other participants like Daniel, William, and Lily (whom I couldn't mention due to space constraints), they struggle with their financial circumstances. Some have told me that as the month ends, they often have less than £100 in their bank accounts. However, as a "responsible adult", instead of seeking financial assistance from their parents, they deal with those situations in an "independently" manner – which Hong Kong society expected "adults" to behave. Consequently, they significantly reduce their entertainment expenses, even opting to have dinner at McDonald's up to five times a week to make ends meet.

In some cases, intergenerational contracts continue to exert their influence. These contracts, marked by "the subordination of younger generations to the will and welfare of their parents and grandparents", as described by Croll (2006, p.474), create stress for young BN(O) migrants who are still struggling with the challenges of establishing themselves in a foreign land.

For example, consider the participant mentioned in Chapter 2.2.3. He felt overwhelmed and sensed that his life had gone off track. However, he still carried the guilt of being unable to address his parents' complaints about their struggles in adapting to life in the UK. In Ryan's case, even though the intergenerational contract has, as described by Croll (2006), been "renegotiated" through an "extended investment" that includes adult children, the expectation of "return" lingers. This "return" takes the form of accommodating parents should they decide to migrate, adding an unknown burden to the migrants and heightening the uncertainties they face.

As Bulloch (2021) remarked, "Transitions to adulthood are becoming more varied, circuitous, precarious, challenging and risky than they once were" (p.367). This is particularly true in the case of young migrants as illustrated above. Their adaptation to a new society, coupled with the responsibilities they bear within the context of Asian culture, compounds the uncertainties and places additional burdens upon them.

To conclude, the experiences of BN(O) young migrants in the UK are characterised by complex interactions between various aspects of their lives and the uncertainties they face. The interplay between cultural differences, family dynamics, age, and uncertainty creates a unique set of challenges that these individuals must navigate as they build new lives in a foreign land. These challenges have profound implications for their emotional well-being, financial stability, and overall quality of life in the UK.

Despite uncertainty has become the everyday of BN(O) migrants, many of them still try to exercise their agency to navigate and negotiate with uncertainties. The next chapter delves deeper into how my participants actively exercise their agency in manoeuvring through uncertainties.

Chapter 5: Cultivating Roots Amidst Uncertainties

As depicted in the previous chapter, uncertainty has become inseparable from the daily life of BN(O) migrants in the UK. This understanding, taking uncertainty rather than certainty as the norm, required us to rethink about coping strategies (Horst and Grabska, 2015, p.10).

Scholars have identified some strategies that people adopted in coping with uncertainties, namely faith, precaution, and avoidance (Boholm, 2003). In the case of migration, Horst and Grabska (2015) suggested that people normally navigate and negotiate uncertainty by holding faith towards their future, preventing negative occurrences or their consequences, and avoiding potentially negative futures.

Some aspects of these strategies, for example, Leo's faith in the British government to amend the scheme; the precautionary savings accrued by various participants in preventing negative occurrences, the avoidance of forming close friendships to mitigate the possibility of separation anxiety, have all briefly touched upon.

This chapter focuses more on how BN(O) migrants exercise their agency, in a more proactive way in dealing with uncertainties, to make place in this new world for them.

5.1 Empowering Through Skills

When uncertainties become a regular part of BN(O) migrants' daily lives, they don't merely go with the flow but also continue to develop their skills. For instance, some of my participants, like Olivia, even though they already possess a certain level of English-speaking skills, chose to attend English lessons in the UK to enhance their communication abilities. Figure 5.1 shows part of the notes she took during her English lessons. When I was living-in with her, from time to time she would tell me different expressions that she had learned enthusiastically – like the different expression of "not my cup of tea" as shown below.

Figure 5.1
Olivia's English Lesson Notes
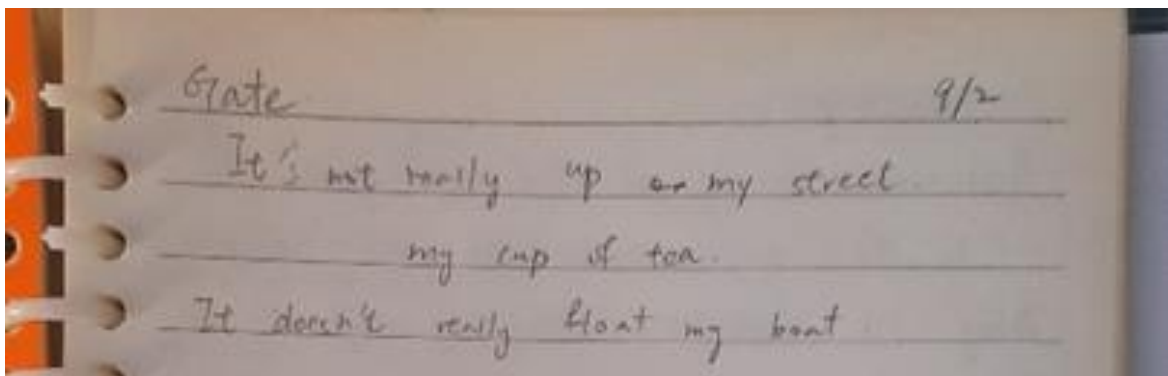
Source: Fieldwork 2023.

In addition to English courses, at least four of my participants are either learning to drive or improving their driving skills. As Ryan pointed out, "*driving allows me to go further*". During my fieldwork, I have also experienced how knowing driving can significantly impact one's life in the UK. For instance, Figures 5.2 and 5.3 depict the GPS data automatically recorded by my phone during my "following" with two different participants in Manchester on separate days. In Figure 5.2, a participant who knows how to drive is shown during his daily commute, while the participant in Figure 5.3 did not possess driving skills. These two figures demonstrate how driving allows individuals to expand their geographical reach.[11]

Figure 5.2

GPS data when "following" Ryan
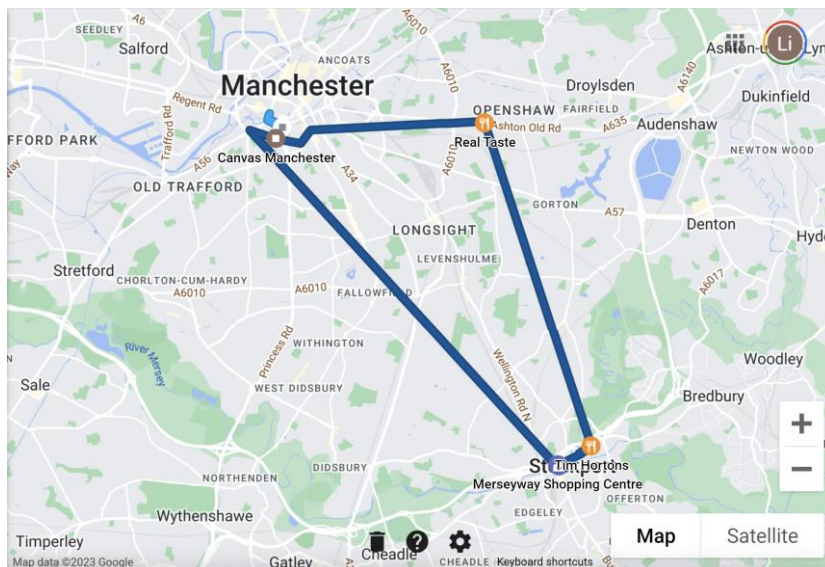
Source: Google Map Screen Capture

Figure 5.3

GPS data when "following" Thomas
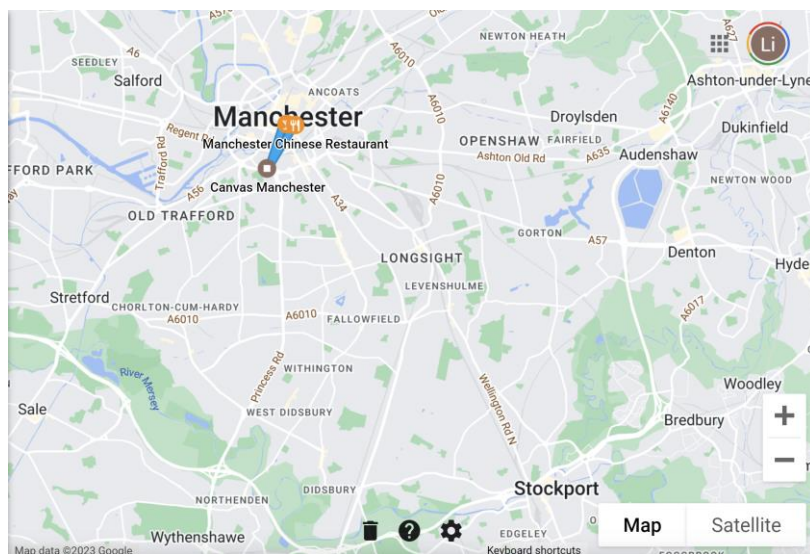
Source: Google Map Screen Capture

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[11] None of these GPS data showed my participants' residential address.

From the maps above, we can observe that by learning or improving driving skills, BN(O) migrants are enhancing their physical accessibility. As indicated by Wachs and Kumagai (1973), improved physical accessibility leads to increased access to activities and opportunities, which is crucial for achieving a better quality of life. These opportunities, including employment, are evident in the cases of my participants. For instance, Ryan managed to secure a delivery job in the first month of his arrival, thanks to his driving skills. The ability to drive also plays a significant role in building and sustaining social connections. For example, Alex drives his Hong Kong neighbours' daughters to school daily, and as a form of reciprocity, his neighbours often "forget" to calculate the price of some food items they purchase together in bulk from wholesalers.

Moreover, apart from language and driving skills, some of my participants also utilized their waiting period to acquire various skills, such as becoming an electrician, carpenter, or improving their cooking skills.

5.2 Carving Out Own Opportunities

In addition to acquire various practical skills, BN(O) migrants leverage their unique advantages to explore new avenues. Like Max, who uses his proficiency in both Chinese and English, as well as his deep contextual knowledge of Hong Kong and China-related issues, to great effect. Given the likelihood of not returning to Hong Kong, his willingness to discuss sensitive themes places him as an intermediary for media outlets, offering translation services and gatekeeping expertise. Max's capacity to actively embrace such roles exemplifies the resilience of BN(O) migrants during their journey on a foreign land.

For William and Lily, they also utilised their advantage of being young and "*have nothing to lose*" in this new place to establish their own company, which dedicated to organising art and cultural events that promote Hong Kong culture. "*We can create our own business opportunities while preserving and promoting Hong Kong culture,*" they explained. So far, they have successfully organised one event, a city hunt designed for both local and Hong Kong participants (see Figure 5.4). They have plans to host a concert later this year, featuring songs adapted from English to Cantopop, highlighting shared collective memories between people in the UK and Hong Kong. In the future, they intend to develop glossary cards for children, particularly those who moved to the UK from Hong Kong at a young age, to learn Cantonese. Their vision includes creating glossary cards tailored to the UK context. For instance, they won't include "minibus" (小巴) in the glossary cards since it is seldom seen in the UK, but terms like "bus" (巴士) will certainly be included.

The two cases above shared parallels with immigrant entrepreneurship, where immigrants mobilise resources like human capital and ethnic capital to align with opportunity structures (Kloosterman, 2010). For example, for the latter case, there is an increasing demand for Cantonese learning for children as their parents don't want their kids to forget Cantonese, and William and Lily plan to utilise this opportunity structure to crave out further opportunities for themselves.

Figure 5.4
Map Designed for City Hunt by William and Lily

Source: Fieldwork 2023.

5.3 Drawing Strength and Resilience from Faith and Culture

This section, in contrast to the previous two, may sound a bit passive. However, it still demonstrates how BN(O) migrants negotiate uncertainties within the scope that they can control - they draw strength and resilience from their faith and culture to persevere.

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend church worship on two occasions. The first time was with Olivia's family, and the second time, I went to a church alone in Manchester. I quickly learned that attending church in the UK required stepping out of one's comfort zone, and Olivia's family, like many others, tried out several churches in their local area. They need time to adapt to the cultural nuances of UK churches, especially when attending worship services not exclusively targeted at Hong Kongers. Like Olivia, she shared with me that she didn't even understand the word "testimonials" for the first few times she attended. Even for churches targeting Hong Kongers, like the one I attended in Manchester, which uses Cantonese as the language of worship and has a priest from Hong Kong, I also felt extremely nervous on my first visit.

Despite these adjustments, attending church was a significant way for BN(O) migrants to maintain a connection with their cultural and spiritual identity. Besides, it is also an important step taken by them to create some sorts of stability by establishing social networks where employment, vital services or even housing could be found (Tsang, 2014).

For example, at the church Olivia attends, the first agenda before the mass is usually announcements. During our visit together, the first announcement addressed an urgent need for accommodation by a church member, prompting a call for assistance from anyone able to help. Olivia also shared with me that the pianist at the church that day is her daughter's piano teacher, who had previously worked in the finance sector in Hong Kong. When she just arrived in the UK, she struggled to find employment. However, after meeting at the church, Olivia asked her to be her daughter's piano teacher. Olivia then asked the pianist to propose the hourly wages, and the amount suggested was half of the cost in Hong Kong, as the pianist also considered about

Olivia's family limited income. From here, we can see that BN(O) migrants are actively forming such a close-knit community in churches, always ready to support one another.

Beyond faith communities, BN(O) migrants maintain strong connections to Hong Kong culture in their daily lives. The language they use, the TV shows they watch, the music they listen to, the decorations of their homes, and the foods they choose all reflect this relationship.

During my fieldwork, two observations left a deep impression on me. Both occurred while I was living with Evan and Daniel.

Despite Evan's avoidance of large Hong Konger social gatherings and his claim that he rarely watches Hong Kong TV programs or listens to Cantopop since his migration, he still maintains a deep connection to Hong Kong culture through his choice of food and home decorations. For instance, he insisted on purchasing fish ball sauce and frozen fish balls – typical Hong Kong sauce and street food. On his fridge, he has even written "Canned Pineapple 1/5/1994," taken from Chungking Express, a 1994 Hong Kong romantic crime comedy-drama film directed by Wong Kar-wai. He has also drawn the Goddess of Democracy, a statue created during the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.5
Handwritten Decorations on Evan's Fridge
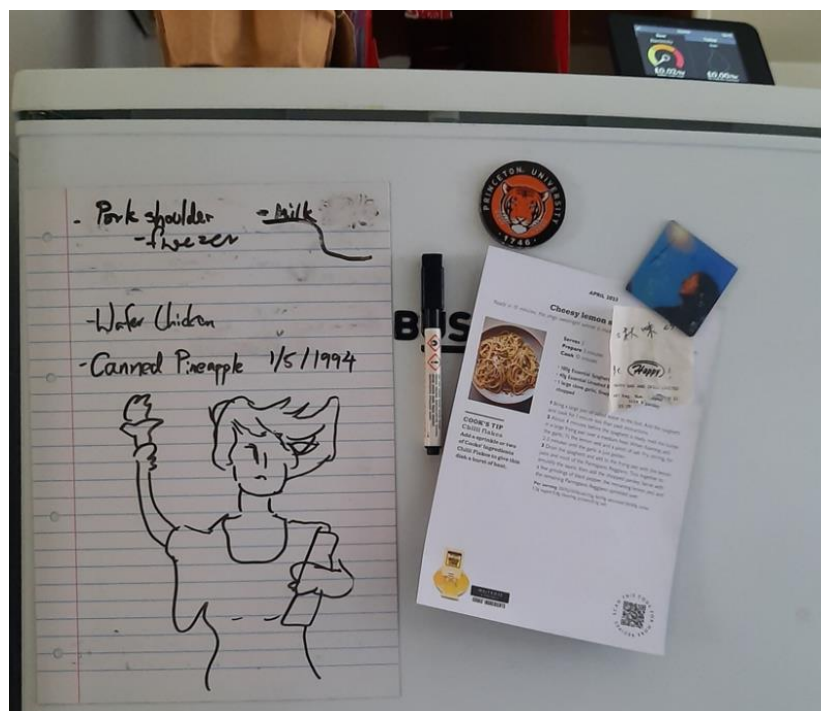
Source: Fieldwork 2023.

The second observation was related to Daniel, who remained relatively reserved and often stayed in his room, either sleeping or working, rarely expressing his emotions. However, during a phone call with a friend, he became enthusiastic when discussing King Maker V, a music competition show in Hong Kong. On the day of the final contest, he allowed me to enter his room to watch it together (Figure 5.7). When I expressed my thoughts about one of the contestants, he even angrily told me not to speak, as that contestant happened to be his favourite.

As I observed that he has put up postcards and posters of some Hong Kong singers in his room, I asked him, "At this moment, what does Hong Kong popular culture mean to you?" He responded, "*It's a symbol and an intangible connection between me and Hong Kong.*"

Figure 5.6
Watching King Maker V with Daniel in his room,
background shows two postcards printed with Hong Kong singers' face (marked in red circle)
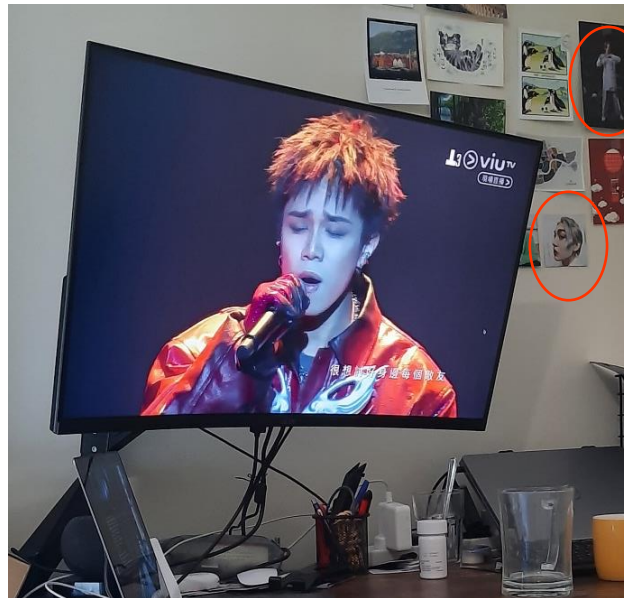
Source: Fieldwork 2023.

As suggested by La Barbera (2014), during migration, "(trans)formation, (re)construction, and negotiation of identity" (p.2) occur. Maintaining one's connection with the cultural identity that they are familiar with can serve as a source of strength and stability amid the challenges of migration. Making a place that shares similarity with their home – Hong Kong, aligns with the concept of "placemaking", where individuals actively transform their surroundings into meaningful and purposeful places of residence (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1995). This process not only facilitates a sense of familiarity but also plays a crucial role in navigating uncertainties in a foreign land. The discussion section of this chapter will delve further into placemaking.

Although this section addresses two distinct topics – faith and culture, in discussions with my participants, they repeatedly brought up the word "*connections*". By establishing and maintaining connections with their cultural and spiritual identity, they find some sense of certainty which allows them to negotiate with uncertainties.

5.4 Discussion

When we examine closer into how BN(O) migrants navigate and negotiation with uncertainties, it becomes evident that the strategies go beyond mere "faith", "precaution", and "avoidance" proposed by Boholm (2015). Instead, a more profound theme emerges - a theme characterised by the participants actively engaging in "placemaking".

Placemaking, encompassing all three elements of place - physical setting, activity, and meaning (Relph, 1976), is a fundamental human endeavour observed in the everyday practices of

individuals. As described by Schneekloth and Shibley (1995), it involves actions such as restoring, maintaining, and representing places that sustain one's sense of self. Therefore, it is more than merely changing the physical architecture, but also creating a feeling of community and connection and actively making a place for oneself in a particular setting.

In the context of BN(O) migrants, the strategies employed by my participants resonate strongly with the concept of placemaking. For instance, In Olivia and Ryan's case as discussed in Chapter 5.1, they demonstrate place making through the acquisition and enhancement of skills. Through language courses, driving lessons, or acquiring new practical skills, Hong Kongers actively shape their abilities to navigate and contribute to their surroundings. This process is not merely a means of coping with uncertainties but a deliberate effort to carve out a place for themselves in the foreign landscape.

In Max, William, and Lily's cases which discussed in Chapter 5.2, they actively leverage their unique advantages, skills, and cultural insights to create opportunities and establish ventures that not only contribute to their own well-being but also add value to the local community – both the Hong Kong community and the UK community. For the Hong Kong community, they "tell 'good stories' of Hong Kong"[12] to the world. For the UK community, they bring in new knowledge and insights. These acts, along with many activities that organised by different Community Interest Corporations set up by Hong Kongers in the UK demonstrated their commitment to not just adapting to the new place but actively shaping it according to their unique background.

In section 5.3, we explored cases which Hong Kongers sustain their spirit through faith and culture. By actively participating in faith communities, maintaining connections to Hong Kong culture, and expressing their identities through various means, they contribute to the social and cultural fabric of their new environment. In doing so, they not only find some degree of certainty within these communities, but actively shape the landscape around them. Such "shaping" even starts from their homes by putting up different decorations related to Hong Kong culture.

To conclude, this chapter presented some strategies employed by my participants which can be viewed as a form of place making - a dynamic process of transforming their immediate surroundings into meaningful and purposeful places of residence. This goes beyond mere adaptation and survival, as they are exercising their agency in "actively search(ing) for, and find(ing) meaning and safety in places of great insecurity" (Denov and Akesson, 2013, p.57).

This sprit reminds the author of a slogan that appeared in the early days when some Hong Kongers were advocating Hong Kong independence – "Hong Kong Nation, be firm with dignity and vigorous self-reliance" (*香港民族 莊敬自強*).

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[12] "Tell good stories of Hong Kong" is a phrase that repeated emphasised by the current Chief Executive of Hong Kong, John Lee. His meaning is to offer positive counter-narratives to global perception of Hong Kong's current situation. Here I put "good stories" in quotation marks for two reasons. First, the fact that large number of Hong Kongers migrate to other countries has already portrayed the real story of Hong Kong to the international community. Second, the resilience and self-reliance exhibited by BN(O) migrants as discussed in this section is actually "good stories" in author's perspective.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the lived experience of BN(O) migrants who were shocked by the truncated autonomy in Hong Kong and decided to ride on the lifeboat to the UK through the BN(O) visa scheme – a journey marked by "uncertainties upon uncertainties". It is important to recognise that their struggles and sufferings extend far beyond the glimpses shared here. These are not merely stories or data, but the real lived experiences of individuals who have gone through and are still going through challenging times.

This research shows that part of these uncertainties, struggles and sufferings are caused by the scheme itself. Through implementing the BN(O) visa scheme, British tried to demonstrate their "historic and moral commitment" towards "BN(O) citizens" (Home Office, 2020a, pg.3). However, the scheme treats BN(O) status holders as voluntary migrants, unlike the British Nationality Selection Scheme rolled out before the transfer of sovereignty which allowed a direct registration as British citizens.

As shown in Chapter 3, the scheme neglected the radical uncertainty stemming from Hong Kong's evolving political situation which has caused Hong Kongers to flee their homeland within a short period. This has led to multiple problems, as some cannot wait for their visa to be approved, some do not accumulate enough resources to sustain themselves in the UK before departure, as normal voluntary migrants would.

After their arrival, as shown in Chapter 4, the exclusion from public funds and the expectation to be self-sustaining create further uncertainties in their "customer journey". Moreover, public services they are entitled to, like the NHS, have service standards that are not satisfactory and cannot fully match their needs.

Further complicating the situation is the interplay between dual cultural influences, the challenges of discovering and adapting to tacit cultural knowledge, and the disruptions in building social networks. BN(O) migrants, especially the young ones, are now struggling with the expectations of being "adults" in both Hong Kong and the UK.

Despite these uncertainties, struggles and sufferings, as shown in Chapter 5, BN(O) migrants are still actively exercising their agency in negotiating and manoeuvring through their challenges, making a place for themselves in this foreign land.

This study contributes to the discussion of migration policy, emphasising the need for nuanced policies that can address the multifaceted challenges faced by migrants according to their unique context. By understanding the interconnected nature of their experiences, policymakers can develop more targeted and effective support systems.

Ten days after I leave the field, the UK government introduced a "priority service" for BN(O) status holder to receive their visa application decision within 5 working days after paying £500 extra for each applicant (Chan, 2023). However, it is far from enough. Given the insights of this paper, policy makers should invest in programs facilitating the exchange of tacit cultural knowledge, creating avenues for migrants to share experiences and build social networks.

Targeted support for young migrants which acknowledged their dual cultural influences, intergenerational challenges and mental health support needs are also needed.

The future of BN(O) migrants, or Hong Kongers in general, is uncertain, and the end is never near. In the case of BN(O) migration, this enduring uncertainty stems from at least three events that are going to happen in the future.

Firstly, whether the transition from the BN(O) visa to ILR and BC will be smooth remains unknown, as the scheme has been implemented for less than five years, and no one has yet qualified for these subsequent stages.

Secondly, in this year's Policy Address, Chief Executive of Hong Kong, John Lee announced that Basic Law Article 23, covering 3 more type of offences related to national security other than those in the NSL, will be enacted by the end of 2024. This adds a layer of unpredictability, as the potential implications on BN(O) migrants, such as whether it would become a barrier if they would like to seek return migration, remain unknown.

Finally, the UK general election, which is set for no later than January 2025, casts uncertainty on the scheme's continuation. This further complicates their prospects for the future.

As BN(O) migrants encounter these incidents, uncertainty persists and continues to impact their journeys in the UK. This calls for continued research into the evolving dynamics and challenges faced by BN(O) migrants as they navigate through these uncertainties.

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Appendices

Appendix I. Timeline of Events in Hong Kong related to NSL and the Launching of BN(O) Visa Scheme by the UK Government (May 2020 to December 2021)

Month	Hong Kong[13]	BN(O) Visa Scheme[14]
May 2020	28<u>th</u>May The National People's Congress backed the *National Security Bill* resolution. The Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party began to draft the law.	
June 2020	4<u>th</u> June The annual candlelight vigil which commemorates the Tiananmen Massacre victims has been banned in Hong Kong for the first time since 1990. Despite the ban, thousands still assembled for the venue to commemorate. At least 4 pan-democrats were charged by the police for inciting others to take part in the commemoration. 30<u>th</u> June The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed the *National Security Law*, and the Law came into effect on the same day at 11pm.	Prime Minister of UK announced the government's plan to provide a settlement route for BN(O) status holders from Hong Kong.

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[13] The events described in Hong Kong presented here represent only a fraction of the overall occurrences. The author of this paper personally participated in most of the listed events (and many more beyond the list) during her career as a journalist in Hong Kong. In compiling this table, the author consulted the company's website (https://tmhk.org/), to obtain the precise dates of the events.

[14] Content organised according to Neal (2022). This table captures the whole launching process of the BN(O) Visa Scheme but doesn't cover two dates when major amendments were made. One is in February 2022 when the standard processing time of BN(O) Visa application was introduced. The other one is in November 2022, when individuals born on or after 1 July 1997, with at least one parent having the BN(O) status, can apply to the route independently.

July 2020	1st July	Home Office announced the details of the new immigration route and also its date to become effective.
	Police banned the annual pro-democracy rally for the first time since 2003. Despite that, thousands of protestors continued to assemble.	
	370 people were arrested throughout the day, including 6 males and 4 females for suspectedly breaching the NSL. Among those arrested under NSL, the youngest is 15 years old. Most of them were arrested as they possessed objects like flag with the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Time" on them.	
	2nd July	
	Hong Kong Public Library retracted some of its collections for review in accordance with the NSL. Retracted books included works by Joshua Wong, Tanya Chan and Wan Chin.	
	3rd July	
	Government statement unilaterally ruled that the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Time" is a slogan implying independence for Hong Kong and/or subverting state power.	
	4th July	
	Implementation Rules for Article 43 of the NSL came into effect.	
	Article 43 of the NSL allows police to enter the relevant place to search for evidence without a warrant. It also provides the government power to freeze, restrain, confiscate and forfeit the property related to offences endangering national security.	
	11 July.	
	Voting of the 2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy primaries begins. Police disturbed polling stations and took pictures of the voters.	

	13 July In responding to the primaries, Carrie Lam, the head of the city that time threatened if the purpose of the primaries is to paralyse the government, organisers and participants can be charged for subversion under the NSL. The statement issued by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau made similar accusations.	
August 2020	1st August Hong Kong government has issued arrest warrants for six pro-democracy activists. They are Nathan Law, Wayne Chan Ka-kui, Honcques Laus, Samuel Chu, Simon Cheng and Ray Wong Toi-yeung. 10 August Police arrested the founder of *Apple Daily* Jimmy Lai Chee-ying and raided the building. They flipped through the documents on the staff tables, including news materials. Police also arrest Agnes Chow, Wilson Li and Andy Li under the National Security Law.	
September 2020	11 September John Lee, Secretary for Security suggested that if the Commissioner of Police believed that any information online threatened national security, he may seek for approval from him and request the publishers, network and service providers to remove such information. 19 September A secondary school student was suspended from school for one week as he used an icon with the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Time" on it for online classes.	

	23 September A teacher teaching in a tutorial centre received a warning letter from the Education Bureau as she made inappropriate comments towards the police - "May the family of bad crops all die" in her private Facebook account. 27 September Police declined the request from the Civil Human Right Front to organize the annual 10.1 Rally using the excuse of pandemic control, unless the organizer can ensure all participants would have leave their personal information.	
October 2020	1st October Dozens of arrests was made for people who attempted to demonstrate as before. 28th October Police announced their plan to set up a hotline for citizens to report citizens who potentially violate the NSL.	The Hong Kong BN(O) visa scheme was officially introduced into legislation by a statement of changes to the Immigration Rules. Alongside with the change, the Impact Assessment of the scheme was conducted.
November 2020	5th November The NSL reporting hotline started to operate. A thousand of reports was received by the police on the first day. 19th November Some students in The Chinese University of Hong Kong organised a protest inside their university, chanting the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Time". The University reported the case to the police. Police entered the University to gather evidence.	The BN(O) Project Team started their preparation for the launch of the scheme.

	21st November Wan Yiu-sing, an online radio host for channel D100, was arrested on suspicion of money laundering and incitement of secession under the National Security Law. He ran a crowd funding campaign supporting young protesters to leave Hong Kong and study in Taiwan. This is the first time that the Hong Kong police used the NSL against crowd funding.	
December 2020	21st December The Court of Final Appeal ruled that government's ban on facing covering during public gather constitutional. 31st December Jimmy Lai, who was on bail previously, was denied bail after the Department of Justice dispute his bail in the Court of Final Appeal.	
January 2021	6th January 53 members from the democratic camp who participated or organised the 2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy primaries were arrested under NSL for conspiracy to commit subversion. Most of them were granted bail in the following days. 31st January Government announced that BN(O) passport was no longer being accepted as any form of identification in Hong Kong, including when Hong Kong residents want to enter or leave Hong Kong.	31st January The BN(O) visa scheme started to accept applications.
February 2021	28th February 47 out of those 53 members from the democratic camp who were release on bail last month were officially charged for conspiracy to commit subversion. Most of them were refused bail by the Court of First Instance.	23rd February The fully digital BN(O) visa application route started to operate.

March 2021	11th March The National People's Congress of the Communist Party of China passed a decision to amend Hong Kong's electoral system. Under the amendment, members from the democratic camp probably have no chance to meet the nomination criteria.	
April 2021	1st April Members from the democratic camp including Jimmy Lai, Lee Cheuk-yan, Margaret Ng, Leung Kwok-hung, Ho Sau-lan, Ho Chun-yan, and Martin Lee were found guilty of participating in one of those peaceful protest in 2019.	BN(O) visa holders are allowed to apply for a change in the conditions of their visa to get access to public funds if they become destitute.
May 2021	6th May Activist Joshua Wong, Tsuen Wan District Councillor Shum Ao-fai, Southern District Councillor Yuen Ka-wai and Kwun Tong District Councillor Leung Hoi-ching were found guilty in participating an unlawful assembly - the banned candlelight vigil on 4th June 2020.	
June 2021	4th June Police arrested Chow Hang-tung, vice chairperson of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China for asking the public to commemorate the Tiananmen Massacre using their own way on social media. On the same day, the *Telecommunications (Registration of SIM Cards) Regulation* were gazetted, stating that Hong Kong people will need to register with their real names when purchasing phone cards in the future.	

	17th June Police conducted another large-scale search of the *Apple Daily* building, arresting five senior editors and executives of the newspaper including Ryan Law Wai-kwong, the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper under the NSL – "crime of conspiracy to collude with foreign countries or foreign forces to endanger national security". All assets of the newspaper were frozen. 23rd June One of the editorial writers of *Apple Daily* were arrested under NSL for the same crime. 24th June *Apple Daily* was forced to cease operation as its assets were frozen. 27th June A former editorial writer of *Apple Daily* were arrested in the Hong Kong International Airport as he was about to leave Hong Kong.	
July 2021	21st July Police arrested former *Apply Daily* Executive Editor-in-Chief Lam Man-Chung. 22nd July Police arrested 5 members of The General Union of Hong Kong Speech Therapists for conspiracy to publish seditious children's books – stories about a village of sheep resisting the wolves from invading their home. Approaching the end of July Lots of Hong Kongers leaving Hong Kong as they feared that *The Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance 2021*, which would be effective on 1st August 2021, would pose barriers for them to leave.	

August 2021	10th August The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, a pro-democracy labour union of teachers which has existed for 48 years, announced to disband due to the changing socio-political situation. 15th August Civil Human Rights Front, the umbrella group which has over 40 NGOs and other political groups as its member organisations and organised the annual 1st July and 1st October protest announced to disband. It has been established for nearly 19 years.	
September 2021	8th September Chow Hang-tung, the vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China was being arrested again, along with the standing committee members Leung Kam-wai, Tang Yue-jun, and Chan Tung-wai. 14th September Wall-fare, an advocacy group for prisoners right announced to disband. 19th September The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, established in 1990, and had over 60 affiliated trade unions announced to disband. 20th September Convener of the student organisation Student Politicism, Wong Yat-chin, the secretary-general Chen Zhi-sam, and former spokesperson Chu Hoi-ying were arrested by the police and accused of violating the NSL.	

	25th September Student Politicism announced to disband, same did the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China.	
October 2021	16th October Former Legislative Council members Eddie Chu, Raymond Chan, Leung Kwok-hung, and former CHRF convener Figo Chan, were sentenced to 6 to 12 months in prison for organizing and participating on the 1^{st of} July demonstration in 2020.	The requirement for dependent partners and children to apply at the same time as main applicant was removed. The BN(O) route has become consistent with other settlement pathways in this aspect.
November 2021	11th November A man who was charged with incitement to secession for shouting pro-Hong Kong independence slogans during protests in 2020 was sentenced to 5 years and 9 months in prison. 23rd November The Convenor of Studentlocalism (a student group that advocated for Hong Kong independence), Tony Chung, received a sentence of 3 years and 7 months for secession. He was 20 years old by then.	
December 2021	23rd December The University of Hong Kong removed the *Pillar of Shame*, a statue commemorating those who died in the Tiananmen Massacre in their campus. The statue was placed in the campus since 1998. 24th December The Chinese University of Hong Kong and Lingnan University removed the *Goddess of Democracy* and *Tiananmen Massacre Relief* in their campus. 29th December Police National Security Department arrested six executives of *Stand News*, accusing them of conspiring to publish seditious publications. *Stand News* announced to cease operations on the same day.	

Appendix II. Participant Profiles

Participant Type	Pseudonym	Data Acquisition Method	Gender	Age	Location currently reside in	Migration route	Current Employment Status in the UK
Family 1	Olivia	Living-in	F	Mid 40s	Reading	BN(O) status holder	Part-time (1 hour per day)
	Alex		M	Mid 40s		BN(O) status holder	Full-time
	Sophia		F	15		Dependent children of BN(O) status holder	College student
Individual	Ethan	Living-in	M	Late 20s	London	BN(O) status holder	0.6 FTE
Individual	Daniel	Living-in	M	Early 30s	London	BN(O) status holder	Full-time
Family 2	Mia	Following	F	Early 30s	London	BN(O) status holder	MA student
	Lucas		M	Early 30s		BN(O) Household Member	Full-time
Individual	Leo	Following	M	Mid 20s	London	BN(O) Household Member	PhD student
Family 3	Max	Living-in	M	Late 30s	London	LOTR	Full-time
	Emily		F	Late 30s		British Citizen	Unemployed
Family 4	Ava	Following	F	Late 20s	Warrington	BN(O) status holder	Full-time
	Grace		F	Mid 50s		BN(O) status holder	Part-time (1 day per week)
	Owen		M	Mid 50s		BN(O) status holder	Part-time (1 day per week)
Individual	Ryan	Following	M	Mid 30s	Manchester	BN(O) status holder	Full-time
Individual	Thomas	Following	M	Mid 30s	Manchester	BN(O) status holder	Self-employed
Family 5	William	Following	M	Late 20s	Manchester	BN(O) status holder	Self-employed
	Lily		F	Late 20s		BN(O) status holder	Part-time (Zero-hour contract)

Appendix III. Fieldwork Schedule in the UK and Activities Involved

Date	Location	Activity (Living-in/ Following)	Details of Interaction with Participants
8th July 2023 – 10th July 2023	Reading	Living-in with Olivia, Alex and Sophia	Participating in daily routines, including but not limited to preparing meals, having meals together, commuting to work/school, grocery shopping, watching TV, doing minor renovations in their house, cleaning up their garden, doing laundry, going to church, delivering food to their friends
11th July 2023 – 18th July 2023	Greater London	Living-in with Ethan and Daniel	Participating in daily routines, including but not limited to commuting to work, grocery shopping, dining out, buying takeaways, preparing meals, having meals together, watching TV, playing TV games, doing laundry, attending friends gathering
20th July 2023	Greater London	Following Mia and Lucas	Home visit, chatting, grocery shopping, having dinner together
21st July 2023	Greater London	Following Leo	Driving around London, grocery shopping, having meal together

Date	Location	Activity	Details
22nd July 2023 – 26th July 2023	Greater London	Living-in with Max and Emily	Participating in their daily routines, including but not limited to preparing meals, having meals together, grocery shopping, watching TV, playing TV games, watching movie in a cinema, window shopping in furniture stores, dining out, visiting bookstores, having family dinner, hosting friends
27th July 2023	Warrington	Following Ava, Grace and Owen	Having lunch and dinner, driving around Manchester and Warrington, going to shopping mall, searching for Hong Kong snacks – bubble waffle
29th July 2023	Manchester	Following Ryan	Driving around Manchester and Stockport, window shopping in shopping center and supermarket, walking along some streets, having coffee in a café and having dinner in a Hong Kong style restaurant
31st July 2023	Manchester	Following Thomas (1)	Having dinner in a Hong Kong style restaurant, having drinks in a bar, grocery shopping in supermarket
2nd Aug 2023	Manchester	Following William and Lily	Having dim sum in a Hong Kong style restaurant, roaming around China Town, searching for bubble tea to drink, home visit
3rd August 2023	Manchester	Following Thomas (2)	Visiting museum, having drinks in a bar