

Adaptation under Divergent Immigration Regimes: Comparing Post-2019 Hong Kong Emigrants in the UK, Canada, Taiwan, and Japan

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The post-2019 outflow of Hong Kong residents has produced sizable communities across multiple destinations, yet adaptation pathways diverge sharply between Western and East Asian contexts. This paper compares the UK, Canada, Taiwan, and Japan to explain how immigration regimes, credential recognition, and migration infrastructures interact with emigrants' prior political socialisation to shape economic, social, cultural, and political incorporation. Conceptually, this paper integrates a culture–structure perspective—mediated by homeland political socialisation—with a skills lens that distinguishes disembedding skills (portable, globally recognised) from embedding skills (site-specific, networked), and identify four recurrent pathways into host labour markets: roaming, realigning, alteration, and downstreaming. It argues that Western regimes privilege portability and mobility for holders of disembedding skills. The UK's BN(O) 5+1 route and Canada's dedicated Hong Kong pathways lower status uncertainty; coupled with reciprocal or streamlined credentialing and remote work in finance and IT, they enable roaming and selective realigning, alongside expanding scope for civic participation through emergent community organisations. In contrast, East Asian destinations impose stronger requirements for language, licensing, and institutional familiarity. In Taiwan, humanitarian and professional channels coexist with tighter vetting and localised hiring; cultural and linguistic proximity can mitigate skill loss for some embedding occupations, yet policy uncertainty and market saturation steer many toward alteration (career switching), downstreaming (entry-level re-entry), and reliance on co-ethnic niches. In Japan, employer- and points-based admissions, longer tracks to settlement, and high linguistic/credential thresholds intensify realigning and downstreaming, with more limited avenues for political incorporation. Empirically, this paper synthesises recent policy developments and documentary sources with qualitative cases of Hong Kong emigrants (including interviews in four destinations) and map how consultancies, education programs, digital platforms, religious groups, and community associations mediate access to jobs, credentials, and belonging. The comparison clarifies patterned privilege and precarity: Western regimes reward portability; East Asian regimes reward localised recalibration and community-anchored cultural skills. It offers a transferable framework linking the social construction of skill, state mobility regimes, and migration infrastructures to the evolving geographies of Hong Kong emigrants.