

**“Tell Me About Yourself”: A Non-Final Assignment**

Part B. Paper and Artist Statement

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### **“Tell Me About Yourself”: A Non-Final Assignment**

Canada, known for its multicultural society and welcoming immigration policies, has become an ideal destination for Hong Kong immigrants, making Cantonese one of the most spoken languages in the country today. The Hong Kong Diaspora in Canada refers to individuals who have relocated from Hong Kong and settled across Canada, driven by personal choices or compelled reasons. This group consists of both immigrants and those on temporary visas, who are integrating into the Canadian cultures while preserving connections to their heritage cultural roots. The migratory waves from Hong Kong to Canada have historically occurred in four major phases, each influenced by distinct socio-political factors, beginning with restrictive policies like the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act and extending through concerns over Hong Kong's handover to China. However, the migrations peaked with a fourth wave around 2020, driven by both the National Security Law and Canada's Lifeboat scheme immigration policy, coinciding with the global concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheung, *Lecture*). Due to such a socioeconomic impact, this period saw unemployment rates increased to a peak of 9.66% (Statcan & Statista, 2024), with immigrants born outside Canada experiencing even higher rates of 10.6% (StatCan & Statista, 2024), displaying the acute challenges faced by the post-COVID Hong Kong diaspora in securing employment and achieving economic stability in their new country.

This paper is inspired by remote interview with Hong Kong resident who have settled in Toronto around 6 months with experience living in both Hong Kong and Canada and complemented by my personal experiences. It aims to explore the multi-impacts of job-seeking on the mental health of the post-COVID Hong Kong diaspora in Canada, and underlying factors influencing these challenges and offers an analysis of a manga (part. A) created by represent these themes visually and narratively.

Individuals who apply under Canada's Lifeboat Scheme are typically young graduates and professionals from Hong Kong who are highly educated and professionally trained. This scheme caters to those who have either completed higher education degrees or diplomas in Canada or have accumulated at least a year's worth of full-time work experience in Canada in last three years of applying (Cheung, *Lecture*). The requirement may put pressure on them to find employment immediately following graduation or to gain full-time work experience, as their ability to successfully integrate into the local job market will determine their immigration status and prospects in Canada.

During the pandemic period, employment opportunities have been decimated by the economic recession. The high stakes associated with finding employment were further underscored by the differences in unemployment rates between new immigrants and the general Canadian citizens. According to Statista data from 2023, new immigrants faced an unemployment rate that was nearly 40% higher than that of the general population (8.8% vs. 5.4%) (StatCan & 11, 2024). This discrepancy indicates the economic vulnerability of new diasporas, who may struggle more than their local counterparts to employment stress.

This problem was also illustrated by a friend of mine who recently immigrated to Toronto from Hong Kong during a remote interview. Despite holding degrees from a top Hong Kong university and relevant management professional experience, she encountered obstacles in finding a senior position in the same industry in Toronto, and receiving only five interview calls from over a hundred job applications.

Although direct academic research on the employment rate or work stress of Canadian Hong Kong diaspora post-COVID seems not available, a cross-sectional research on Chinese

immigrants' mental health in the United States provides comparative data and insights that may be applicable.

The study by Li et al. (2022) indicates high prevalence rates of depression (36%) and anxiety (29%) among Chinese immigrants in the United States during the pandemic period and identified unemployment as a significant factor associated with increased anxiety ( $p = .036$ ) (Li et al., 2022). This suggesting that similar patterns may also be present among the Hong Kong diaspora in Canada, particularly given the similar socio-economic disruptions of COVID.

Additionally, the Hong Kong diaspora in Canada might face further mental health challenges due to a cultural hesitance to seek help. Research indicates that, despite experiencing mental health issues, Chinese Canadians are less likely than other ethnic groups to contact health professionals for mental health reasons (Chen et al., 2009). This reluctance is attributed to a combination of factors, including cultural perceptions of mental illness, stigma, and the belief in handling personal issues within the community or family structure. For those suffering from work-related mental health issues, this cultural disposition can further exacerbate their conditions, leading to a higher risk of untreated anxiety and depression.

*“Every time I introduced my background, the interviewers seemed large more valued about local Canadian experience. They were hesitant to offer me a senior position, suggesting instead that I start at a junior level. This made me question the necessity of my past experiences. It felt unjust, as if my prior efforts and achievements were being dismissed or wasted.”* She demonstrated in the interview. But this struggle did not end there: *“However, the worst part was the video calls with my parents back in Hong Kong. Every conversation reminded me of the immense efforts I’ve made with nothing to show for it. Their nagging frustrates me, but it brings a stronger sense of guilt for my current situation (Anonymous, Personal communication, 2024).”*

This pressure from parents to achieve success is deeply rooted in the narratives of many Asian diasporas, as shown by my friend's experiences, which highlight the frequently overlooked impact of Intergenerational Trauma (IGT) within Chinese Canadian communities beyond the visible challenges like language barriers or acculturation. IGT, defined as the transmission of the effects of trauma from one generation to the next, largely shapes the psychosocial dynamics within diaspora communities (Chou et al., 2023). In the context of the Hong Kong diaspora, many of the older generations immigrated from China or to Canada because of political turmoil like the Cultural Revolution (Cheung, *Lecture*). This historical backdrop creates an environment where high expectations are set for their next generation, conditioning children from a young age to prioritize high achievement and stability (Chou et al., 2023). Thus, when such dissonance arises between meeting high parental expectations and the challenges of stabilizing oneself in a new professional environment, it can exacerbate these new diasporas' mental health problems, making them feel both unbalanced and unsupported. Furthermore, these individuals might continue the negative cycle of IGT by further transmit similar pressures to their own next generation. This is already evident among many second-generation Canadian-born immigrants, as discussed during our lecture, who experienced the dual challenges of meeting high parental expectations while integrating into the broader Canadian society, including language learning and acculturation processes.

In conclusion, the Hong Kong diaspora in Canada faces employment challenges in the post-COVID era, highlighting a higher mental health risk influenced by both external and internal factors. The difficulty for a suitable employment is compounded through unrecognized international credentials and intense familial expectations due to Intergenerational Trauma (IGT).

Addressing these issues in the future may require culture-sensitive support systems to ensure the skill-evaluation fairness and well-being is prioritized.

### **Artist Statement for the Part. A Comic**

“Tell Me About Yourself” is a common interview opening question, which I use as a metaphor for the ongoing journey of self-discovery among the Hong Kong diaspora in Canada. This manga explores the prevalent issues of cultural identity and social expectations among Hong Kongers, reflecting the continuous nature of cultural adaptation and identity resolution, hence the subtitle “Non-final Assignment.”

The protagonist’s appearance is inspired by the character *Hong Kong* from the anime “*Hetalia*,” which personifies countries. I used it to better represent the collective experiences of the Canadian Hong Kong diaspora and using the pronouns as ‘they/them’. The story is influenced by both my own career-seeking experiences and those of my friends.

The narrative begins with a dream panel that introduces the protagonist’s connections to Hong Kong, setting the stage for a story about cultural identity and belonging. The setting of a job interview is chosen to heighten the protagonist's anxiety, which is reflected through recurring visuals of clock on a smartphone and a watch, intensifying the moment's pressure. As the interview progresses, I employ a puzzle metaphor in p.4 to depict the protagonist's background—a complex combination shaped by diverse influences, including a high GPA and multi-professional skills. However, the conversation shifts to how they overcome challenges, digging deeper into the protagonist's personal and cultural struggles, rather than just a typical professional context for the general interviewees.

Shadowy figures representing societal expectations and parental pressures emerge, symbolizing deeper challenges that extend beyond employment opportunities to touch on issues

of identity and self-perception. This segment of the manga aims to demonstrate the fragmentation of self-perception, where personal reflections on past experiences, cultural identity, and social expectations intersect and sometimes conflict.

The story concludes with the protagonist being awakened by a morning time alarm, suggesting that the entire narrative might have been a dream. However, this ending also signifies anxieties that these reflections are continuing to persist even in moments of sleep, underscoring the ongoing protagonist's psychological struggles.

The dialogue mirrors the protagonist's reflections on two different perspectives: English portions represent their interactions with Canadian culture, while the Cantonese segments, translated with the help of my friends, represent the Hong Kong side interactions with self-reflections and family expectations.

By creating this manga, I am not only to show the situation experienced by contemporary Hong Kongers in Canada but also hope to evoke awareness by fostering a connection and understanding of these deep-seated issues including what I stated on my previous research part to the general readership.

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