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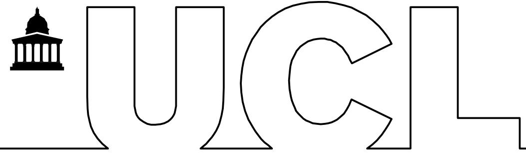

The impact of migrant entrepreneurship on acculturation and identity construction: A case study of diasporic Hongkongers in the UK

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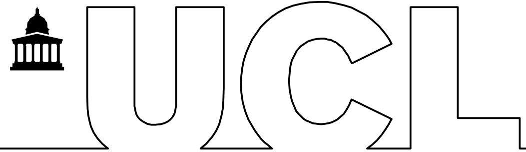

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has been widely adopted as a policy to support migrants, yet the focus on its economic benefits has overshadowed its socio-cultural impacts. This dissertation, drawing on acculturation theory and social identity theory, explores the effects of being an entrepreneur on the identity reconstruction of post-2019 Hong Kong (HK) migrants in the UK. While existing literature often portrays identity as a static concept that founders draw upon to shape their ventures, this study argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurship and identity. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 HK migrant entrepreneurs and participant observation at three cultural festivals, it is found that while their ventures are influenced by multiple identities, including whether they identify more as Hongkongers or British, entrepreneurship also serves as a sociocultural learning process for migrants to construct their new identity. This occurs typically through three mechanisms: (i) relationship building, (ii) emotional attachment and (iii) customer feedback. Additionally, the findings suggest that entrepreneurship empowers migrants to enact their agency and mitigate acculturative stress, eventually improving their overall well-being. This study contributes to the fields of entrepreneurship and migrant studies in three key ways: first, it emphasises the reciprocal nature of the relationship between entrepreneurship and migrant identity construction; second, it broadens the understanding of migrant entrepreneurship by focusing on its socio-cultural, not just economic, outcomes; and third, it provides empirical evidence of how post-2019 HK migrants redefine their identity through entrepreneurship, offering valuable insights for future research on migrant entrepreneurship and the evolving identity of the HK diaspora.

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List of Abbreviation

BN(O) – British National (Overseas)

DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

HK – Hong Kong

HKPORI – Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute

UK – United Kingdom

VCSE – Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise

VIA – Vancouver Index of Acculturation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past few decades, a growing number of people have left or been forced to leave their homelands due to geopolitical conflicts, human rights violations, or natural disasters (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). In 2020, there were 281 million international migrants worldwide, accounting for 3.6% of the global population (United Nations, 2020). While most migrants have a choice, some do not. For these individuals, migration is more than a simple relocation; it is often accompanied by financial hardship, discrimination, and challenges to both mental and physical health (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024; Torlinska et al., 2020).

In response to these challenges, entrepreneurship has been widely adopted by governments as a policy tool to support migrants, offering self-employment as a pathway to economic stability (Polychronopoulos & Nguyen-Duc, 2024). For example, the European Commission (2020) has incorporated migrant entrepreneurship in its "Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027" and suggested that member states should "encourage entrepreneurship among migrants through tailored training and mentoring programmes…and including entrepreneurship in integration programmes" (p.13). Similar initiatives also exist in the United States and Canada, where private-sector programs provide knowledge-based services, mentoring, and tailored counselling to support migrant entrepreneurship (Desiderio, 2014).

Despite its widely acknowledged impact, migrant entrepreneurship is often framed primarily as an economic activity. Those who support the policy argue that migrants could achieve financial independence and economic integration with the host country through entrepreneurship (Chitac, 2021; Desiderio, 2014). Extensive academic literature has also focused on how migrant entrepreneurs contribute to the host country's economy, such as creating jobs, providing skilled labour and bringing in valuable social capital (Eraydin et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2019; Sahin et al., 2011). However, as Jones Christensen & Newman (2024) suggested, these arguments might have overemphasised the economic benefits and neglected the socio-cultural impact of migrant entrepreneurship, thereby narrowing the definition of entrepreneurial success to mere profit or venture survival. Furthermore, this focus on economics simplified the broader socio-cultural challenges that migrants face, including the often stressful process of redefining "who I am" in a new environment—a process known as acculturation (Berry, 1997; Jones Christensen &

Newman, 2024). Therefore, this dissertation aims to explore entrepreneurship's impact on migrants' identity reconstruction process.

The relationship between identity and entrepreneurship has gained increasing academic attention lately. The founder identity theory (Baker & Powell, 2020; Powell & Baker, 2014, 2017) suggests entrepreneurs "use their firms as vehicles to defend who they are or to become who they want to be" (Powell & Baker, 2014, p.1406). Building on that, Jones Christensen & Newman (2024) recently proposed a "reinvention vs reinforcement" model, suggesting that refugee entrepreneurs who seek to reinforce their original identity tend to engage in ethnic-related businesses. In contrast, those who wish to distance themselves from their original identity are more likely to pursue mainstream ventures and integrate into the host society. However, existing literature often portrays the relationship between identity and entrepreneurship as unidirectional, assuming identity as a static concept that entrepreneurs merely draw upon when creating their ventures. Thus, responding to the call from Grimes (2018) and Wagenschwanz (2021), this dissertation aims to explore the dynamic relationship between migrants' identity construction and entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on how identity is shaped and reshaped during the venture-creation process.

To serve this purpose, I conducted an empirical study with a group of Hong Kong (HK) migrant entrepreneurs who relocated to the UK following the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill movement in HK. Previous research has suggested that the social movement in 2019, coupled with their homeland's rapidly deteriorating political environment, has given rise to a strong and unique diasporic identity among these migrants, distinct from the pan-Chinese and pre-2019 HK migrant community (Fong, 2022; M. Kan et al., 2021; To & Chan, 2023). Given HK's colonial history under British rule, the struggle of their identity between Hongkongness, Chineseness and Britishness has created a unique context for me to examine how they acculturate in the UK and use entrepreneurship to define their new identity. In addition, the short settlement history of this group also allowed me to explore the early stages of migrant identity reconstruction.

The main research question for this study is: "*What is the relationship between entrepreneurship and identity construction among post-2019 HK migrants in the UK?*"

Through semi-structured interviews with 12 post-2019 HK migrant entrepreneurs and participatory observation at three cultural festivals, my finding suggests that while entrepreneurs draw on their identities to create new ventures, it is also a sociocultural learning process for migrants to navigate their positions in the host society, typically through three mechanisms: (i) relationship building, (ii) emotional attachment and (iii) customer feedback. It has also been found that being an entrepreneur helps migrants enact their agency and mitigate acculturative stress, a series of social and psychological problems that follow acculturation (Berry, 1992), eventually contributing to their overall well-being.

As such, the contribution of this study is threefold. First, it fills the gaps in entrepreneurship studies by answering the calls from scholars (such as Chitac, 2021; Grimes, 2018; Powell & Baker, 2017; Wagenschwanz, 2021) to study the effect of venture building on founders' social identities. The discovered reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurship and migrant identity helps to bring the research on entrepreneurial identity closer to reality. Second, the findings expand our understanding of migrant entrepreneurship and highlight its socio-cultural impact in mitigating migrants' acculturative stress, which might change how we assess the success of these entrepreneurs in the future. Lastly, the research contributes to Hong Kong studies by providing empirical data on how the post-2019 Hong Kong diaspora uses their ventures to construct their identity overseas. These insights will be valuable for future research on the evolution of this community.

This dissertation is structured as follows. *Chapter 1* serves as the foundation of the study. It provides an overview of the research and explains its importance. *Chapter 2* introduces the background of the study, which covers the history and origin of Hongkongers identity and presents an overview of the post-2019 HK migrants in the UK. *Chapter 3* critically reviews the key concepts employed in this study from socio-psychology and entrepreneurship studies. *Chapter 4* describes the research design and explains the methodology. *Chapter 5* presents the initial findings derived from thematic analysis. *Chapter 6* discusses the findings, contextualises them in literature and answers the research question. Chapter 7 concludes the study, outlines the limitations and provides directions for future studies.

Chapter 2: Research Background: Post-2019 HK migrants in the UK

This chapter introduces the research background and current situation of post-2019 HK migrants in the UK, including the origin of their identity, the formation of the HK diaspora, their motivations for migration and intra-ethnic tension emerging between the pre- and post-2019 HK migrants and Chinese migrants.

2.1 Introduction

The Anti-Extradition Bill protests that happened in HK in 2019, followed by the implementation of the National Security Law, sparked a new exodus among Hongkongers (Chan et al., 2022; Kan et al., 2023). Due to the colonial history and the establishment of the British Nationals (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa scheme — a special immigration channel for HK residents (Office for National Statistics, 2024) — the UK has become the most popular destination, followed by Canada, Australia and Taiwan (HKIAPS, 2022). As of March 2024, 144,000 Hongkongers have arrived in the UK through the BN(O) visa scheme in around three years since its introduction on 31 January 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2024). According to a study report (N=1310), a large portion of them are middle-aged (37.4% aged 40-49 years old) and have received tertiary education (78.4%). Yet, language barriers, cultural differences, financial problems, and career breaks remain among the most significant challenges to their well-being and prosperity in the UK (Yue, 2023).

To support their settlement and integration, the UK government established the “Hong Kong BN(O) Welcome Programme” alongside a Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) fund. In 2024, a grant of up to £650,000 was allocated to support the employability of Hongkongers in the UK with one of the aims to support “BN(O) status holders to…start/grow a business” (DLUHC, 2021, 2024). While there is no available data on the number of ventures founded by post-2019 HK migrants, a study in 2022 revealed that 27% of them were interested in starting their businesses (UKHK, 2022). In response to the interest, several organisations have established entrepreneurship support programmes with funding from the UK government.

2.2 Origin of the Hongkongers identity

Given the complexity of Hongkongers' identity, the acculturation experience of the post-2019 HK migrants in the UK must be seen against the backdrop of their British colonial history and their relationships with China. The construction of Hongkongers' identity could be divided into five distinct periods: (i) the era before the Opium War (before 1841), (ii) the postwar British colonial period (1841-1984), (iii) the pre-handover period (1984-1997), and (iv) the post-handover period (1997-2008) and (v) the establishment of new HK identity (2008-present) (Ma, 2018; Sussman, 2010).

Before becoming a British colony in 1841, HK was mainly inhabited by farmers and fishermen from five Chinese indigenous communities, all of whom spoke different dialects. Despite their core identity as Chinese, they would primarily identify with their regional and dialect-based community, such as the Fujianese, Chaozhou, and Hakka-speaking groups (Sussman, 2010). It was not until after the end of World War II that the concept of "Hongkonger" started emerging (Chan & To, 2023). On the one hand, the influx of Chinese migrants during the 1950s, who deemed HK a lifeboat to escape from the political unrest and economic hardship in China, dominated the population in HK and brought Chinese values and cultural practices (Lau, 1997). On the other hand, HK was ruled by British colonial governors, with a judicial and economic system similar to the UK. Despite the British population remaining a numerical minority, Western concepts, values, and social and behavioural structures were institutionalised through public laws and rituals (Sussman, 2010). The Chinese population in HK were, thus, exposed to a "dual system of Chinese and Western cultural elements" (Sussman, 2010, p.16) and has adopted and operated the two value systems separately: practising Chinese behaviour in the private domain among friends and family and Western behaviours in the public realm, such as workplace (Sussman, 2010).

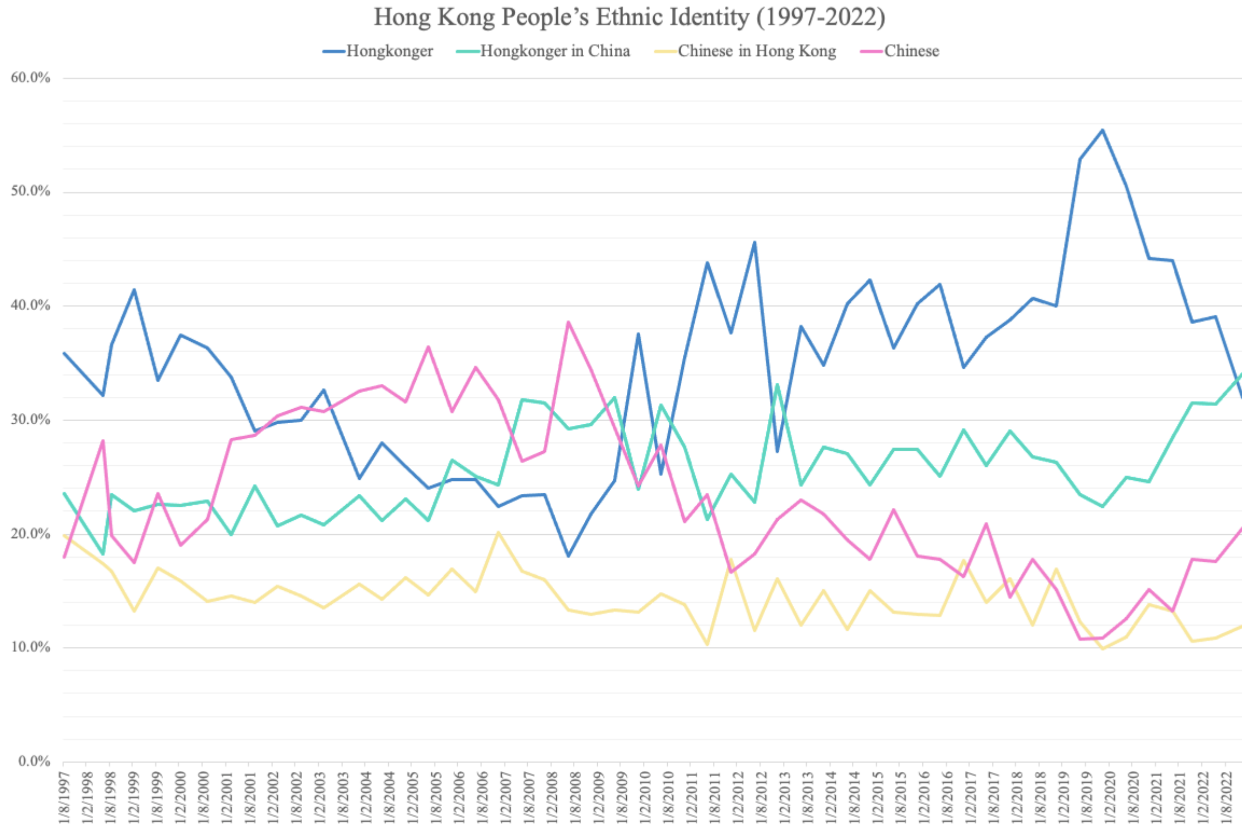
The bicultural identity of Hongkongers, which is neither traditional Chinese nor British, became more crystallised by the 1960s, as the local-born baby boomers started to recognise the city's unique culture and embraced the hybrid identity (Chan & To, 2023; Lau, 1997). Interestingly, while Hongkongers used their Chineseness to differentiate themselves from the colonial governors (Brewer, 1999), the concept of local identity was primarily built on "opposition to the Chinese rather than to the British" (Sussman, 2010, p.17). According to Lau (1997), several

factors were critical to the formation of HK's identity before the in 1997: (i) the border restrictions between HK and mainland China; (ii) the substantial difference in the developmental path between socialist mainland China and capitalist HK; (iii) the international economic structure of HK and (iv) the difference in governance. Coupled with the fact that a large portion of the population arrived in HK to flee political unrest and economic suffering, "[T]his meant that there was in HK a strong sentiment against the socialist regime in China, which naturally became a core element of the Hongkongese identity" (Lau, 1997, p.3). In other words, the identity of Hongkongers was shaped under British influence and was constructed by differentiating themselves from mainland Chinese.

The 1997 handover of Hong Kong from the Great Britain to China did not resolve the struggle for identity; instead, it presented Hongkongers with a greater identity crisis (Lowe & Tsang, 2018). In the early post-1997 period, there was a growing sense of identification with China (Ma, 2018), with the population identifying as "Chinese" or "Chinese in Hong Kong" rising from 37.9% to 47.4% between 1997 and 2008 (HKPORI, 2022). Yet, 2008 marked a watershed moment (see Graph 1). Due to Beijing's increased political intervention and the backfire of economic integration, the population identifying as "Chinese" or "Chinese in Hong Kong" has dropped to a low of 20.8% in 2019, with those identifying as "Hongkongers" reaching a peak of 55.4% (HKPORI, 2022; Ma, 2018). As Ma (2018) suggested, "[I]t changed from the development of a pragmatic national identity as Chinese, to a more assertive Hong Kong identity, in defiance of Chinese political control and economic prowess, driving towards more support for self-determination" (p.38).

In light of growing anti-China sentiment, a sense of "colonial nostalgia" has emerged in recent years, especially among the youth, who began looking into HK's colonial past to shape their new identity despite having little or no personal memories of that period (Lowe & Tsang, 2018). The sentiment became particularly evident during two of Hong Kong's largest protest movements: the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019 (Hampton & Mok, 2023). The former was sparked by China's decision to introduce a pre-screening process for candidates in the 2017 Chief Executive election, while the latter was triggered by a controversial law that would have allowed the extradition of fugitive offenders to mainland China. During these protests, demonstrators waved the Lion and Dragon flag, the symbol of HK during its colonial period, to show their opposition to government policies. In other words, their

nostalgia was used to express their dissatisfaction towards the present and restoration of the "good old days" was seen as the pathway to a brighter future (Lowe & Tsang, 2018).



Graph 1. Hong Kong People's Ethnic Identity (Source: HKPORI, 2022)

2.3 The Emergence of HK diaspora in the UK

HK, often described as a "city of flow" with a constant movement of invaders, travellers, traders, and immigrants (Chan & To, 2023), has witnessed large-scale emigration before. However, despite the significant number of Hongkongers living abroad and the emergence of a unique identity in the city, the concept of overseas HK diaspora remained largely invisible until the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement (Fong, 2022).

Political factors have been proven to be a strong driver for developing the identity of overseas Hongkongers. Based on a large-scale dataset (N=3,033), Kan et al. (2023) found that participation in social movements is a strong push factor for Hongkongers' migration and is strongly associated with their identity. This echoes Yue's (2023) findings, which suggested that

political factors, such as judiciary independence and freedom of assembly and speech, are the most important reasons for people to leave HK. While it was suggested that their migration is also driven by other factors, such as favourable settlement schemes, the future and education of their children and lifestyle (Chan & To, 2023; Lui et al., 2022), Fong (2022) argued that the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement was critical in mobilising the overseas Hongkongers and constructing a diaspora.

As illustrated by Fong (2022), before 2019, overseas Hongkongers tended to tap into the more extensive pan-Chinese diaspora network (including those from mainland China, Taiwan or Southeast Asia) to access resources instead of "singling itself out as a separate 'Hong Kong diaspora'" (Fong, 2022, p.1064). Yet, a new community has formed after 2019, evidenced by the emergence of multiple support groups and civil society organisations founded by and aiming merely to serve these recent HK migrants. They have become a new imagined community with a "transnationally dispersed" collective identity and a new set of practices and cultures (Anderson, 1983; Sokefeld, 2006). For example, after the arrival of the post-2019 HK migrants, To & Chan (2023) observed an intra-ethnic tension in Chinese churches in the UK between migrants from mainland China and HK, and those who came from HK before and after 2019. The tensions have their roots in the strong political identity embraced by the post-2019 HK migrants, which has led them to establish separate churches and create a new political-social-religious space instead of integrating into the existing communities (To & Chan, 2023).

Interestingly, a new identity, "British Hongkongers", has emerged among HK migrants who arrived in the UK after 2019. As Yue (2023) shown, while 59.9% of 1,310 respondents still identify as Hongkongers, 36.1% identify themselves as British Hongkongers, an identity currently not recognised in official documents. It is clear that a new collective identity is emerging among the HK diaspora and outside their homeland, and the question is how. How do they define themselves in this triple identity (British, Chinese and Hongkongers) situation? What role does entrepreneurship play in this process? How do migrant entrepreneurs use their ventures to construct their new identity, and how does being an entrepreneur impact identity reconstruction?

Chapter 3: Literature Review

To understand how being an entrepreneur impacts the identity transformation process of migrants, it is first necessary to explore what identity is, how it evolves and changes, and the existing work about entrepreneurship and identity. The following chapter will introduce the key theoretical concepts from social psychology and entrepreneurial studies employed in the study.

3.1 Concept of Identity

Identity is a vague and broad concept that different scholars have conceptualised in multiple ways (e.g. social, role, personal and cultural identity) (Schwartz et al., 2006). In its simplest form, identity is "people's subjectively construed understandings of who they were, are and desire to become" (Brown, 2015, p.20) and refers to the meaning individuals attach to themselves to define who they are and the groups they belong to.

As defined by Stuart Hall (1990) in his influential work "*Cultural Identity and Diaspora*", identity is a matter of "becoming as well as of being" (p.225). From a developmental perspective, Erikson (1968) also argues that identity results from the dynamic interaction between the self and the socio-cultural context, and it is essential for individuals to build a coherent narrative of their experiences, motivations, values and abilities in their adolescence or early adulthood. In other words, identity is how people define themselves in relation to their surroundings, others, and the wider society, and should not be seen as a static and fixed concept. Instead, it is constantly shaped and reshaped in social structures as the context changes.

While identity is a multifaceted and complex concept, this study focuses on the cultural and ethnic identity of Hongkongers in the UK, which is conceptualised as how they define their relationship with the UK, HK, and China and how they practice their cultural values and traditions in their new environment (Lau, 1997).

3.2 Migrant Acculturation

When migrants first arrive in a new country, they often experience a complete (re)construction of identity, as they have lost their social status, network, history and image once they leave their homeland (La Barbera, 2015). The process is usually known as acculturation, defined as the

cognitive and behavioural changes resulting from "the continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups" (Redfield et al., 1936).

Behavioural and Value Changes: Sociocultural Learning

A fundamental assumption of acculturation is that individuals undergoing cultural transitions may lack the necessary skills to fully engage in the new society, leading to challenges in navigating everyday social interactions (Sam & Berry, 2010). To overcome these difficulties, migrants are expected to learn and adopt certain cultural-specific skills, such as language, to navigate the new environment (Sam & Berry, 2010). Through daily interaction with the host community, migrants would gain knowledge about intercultural communication skills (verbal or non-verbal), rules, norms and values, as well as the benefits, drawbacks, and responsibilities of engaging in the host culture (Berry, 1992).

As Schwartz et al. (2006) argue, this process could lead to changes in cultural identity, which refers to "specific values, ideals, and beliefs (e.g., individualism, collectivism, familism, filial piety) adopted from a given cultural group, as well as one's feelings about belonging to that group" (p.7). Through daily interactions, migrants learn about new behaviours and values from a new cultural group. As time passes, their perception of "who is one of us" might change as they gain deeper knowledge about the host culture.

Cognitive Changes: Social Identity Theory

Another perspective in acculturation studies stands at the cognitive position, which concerns how people perceive their relationship with others and construct their understanding of "which group do I belong to" during intercultural encounters (Sam & Berry, 2010). Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 2004) is one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding the relationship between individuals and collectives.

Tajfel (1978) defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and social significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p.63). According to social identity theory, identity is shaped by two important processes: social categorisation and social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000). Individuals would classify themselves and others into

different social categories based on various attributes, such as ethnicity, gender, place of origin or occupation. These social categories are “parts of a structured society and exist only in relation to other contrasting categories (for example, black vs. white)” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.225). This process creates a boundary between “in-group (us)” and “out-group (them)”. As Tajfel & Turner (2004) argued, individuals need to feel a sense of belonging to a group to experience security and well-being, and result in developing a favourable bias toward the people in the same group when comparing to others (Stets & Burke, 2000). Moreover, this creates an identity prototype, which includes “value-laden behavioural norms about appropriate means to accomplish things” (Powell & Baker, 2017, p.2384), and individuals would conform to the prototype once they identified as a social group member.

In the context of acculturation, social identity theory concerns how individuals answer the question of “Who am I? To which group do I belong?”. It is used to understand how migrants define their identity in relation to others from the ethnic group or the host society (Sam & Berry, 2010). It is common that migrants, in particular, see identity as fluid and multiple; they can identify with several in-groups and choose to behave differently in different situations and contexts (Hamidou-Schmidt & Mayer, 2021; La Barbera, 2015).

It is worth noting that the three dimensions of acculturation - behaviour, value and identification - are not necessarily in sync and change at the same rate or direction (Schwartz et al., 2010). Individuals could practice new cultural behaviours when interacting with the host society but remain identified as their original identity or uphold the traditional values in their homeland. It is also suggested that their acculturation strategies might differ in public and private domains (Celenk & Van De Vijver, 2011).

Acculturation Strategy and Outcome

How do people change when they arrive in a new country? One of the most influential frameworks for conceptualising acculturation is the two-dimensional model proposed by Berry (1992, 1997). He suggests that all cultural groups and their members must confront two important issues after engaging with a new cultural group: (i) the maintenance of original culture and customs and (ii) the desirability of contact and participation with other cultural groups. These two issues are considered simultaneously and independently of one another. They are

usually responded to on a continuous scale (ranging from positive to negative) instead of a dichotomous (yes or no) decision (Berry, 1992). Through everyday interaction with the host society, migrants are likely to adopt one of the four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation or marginalisation (see Figure 1).

Assimilation refers to the process in which individuals abandon their original cultural identity and fully embrace the host culture. Separation, on the contrary, is the maintenance of one's original practice and culture while avoiding interaction with others in the host country (Berry, 1992, 1997). These two strategies could be seen as two sides of the same coin, representing two contradicting cultural orientations, but could both be enacted involuntarily by governments' social segregation policies or discrimination within the host community. Marginalisation happens when migrants disengage with both the receiving and heritage culture; however, this is a relatively rare scenario, and scholars have questioned its validity (Schwartz et al., 2010).

The last one is integration, also known as biculturalism, which happens when migrants adopt the culture of both their home and host country (Berry, 1997). Many migrant literature presents it as the ideal state; for example, Sam & Berry (2010) argued that integrationists are the most adaptive in various settings and are associated with better psychological and sociocultural outcomes. Several scholars supported the notion and claimed that bicultural individuals tend to show better academic results, higher self-esteem and fewer psychological issues due to the availability of double resources and competence from ethnic and mainstream groups (Coatsworth et al., 2005; Feliciano, 2001). However, recent literature has also criticised the notion of integration for its "groupist" understanding of immigrants and the false assumption that national societies are singular, preexisting, and historically unchanging (Vertovec, 2020). In other words, the idea of "integration" assumes that there is an ideal prototype that defines Britishness for migrants to learn and adopt while British culture and society are constantly evolving. Although these criticisms are valid to some extent, this framework remains valuable within the scope of this study for understanding how individuals orient themselves toward the host and home cultures.

The desirability of contact and participation with other cultural groups		The maintenance of original culture and customs: Yes	The maintenance of original culture and customs: No
	No	Integration	Assimilation
	Yes	Separation	Marginalisation

Figure 1. Acculturation strategies (Source: Berry, 1992)

Acculturative Stress

While scholars widely use Berry's (1992) framework to study how individuals adapt to a new environment after migration (see Berry, 1992, 1997; Dow, 2011; Gordon, 1964; Redfield et al., 1936; Schwartz et al., 2010), it has also been criticised for its universalist approach, which assumes the same psychological process and factors apply to everyone (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). For example, Bhatia & Ram (2001) argued that non-white and non-European migrants could experience a more stressful and difficult acculturation process due to significant cultural and physical differences between them and the dominant group in the host society. They are more likely to be seen as "foreigners" and feel alienated.

This stress, also known as acculturative stress, is a particular set of stresses caused by identity confusion, feelings of marginality and alienation, and problems in daily interaction with family, schools, and work (Berry, 1992). As suggested by Erikson (1968), people need a coherent and relatively stable understanding of themselves. Relocation or displacement, however, disrupts this process and creates an "identity jolt" or discontinuities, particularly for those who were forced to

leave their homeland (Jones Christensen & Newman, 2024). Moreover, as individuals participate to various extents in two cultures, their underlying values, behaviours, and beliefs can clash and induce psychological conflicts (Berry, 2006). This would lead to different psychological issues such as anxiety (due to uncertainty in a new environment) and depression (due to cultural loss) (Berry, 2006) and, thus, impact the overall well-being of migrants.

Previous literature has identified a series of factors impacting the acculturation process and the stresses individuals experience (see Dow, 2011; Jones Christensen & Newman, 2024; Schwartz et al., 2010). For instance, individual characteristics such as age, gender, language ability, education level, socio-economic status, migration motivation (voluntary or forced), duration of stay and the cultural gap between the origin and destination have been proven theoretically and empirically to impact migrants' identity processes (see Baldassar et al., 2017; Berry, 1992; Błajet, 2022; Dow, 2011; Lin et al., 2022). The background of the host country, including the economic situation, political context, immigration policies, multicultural ideology, and attitudes towards migrants, also has a role in the process (Berry, 1992; Lin et al., 2022). One thesis that I advance in this paper is that being an entrepreneur could help tackle part of the acculturative stress that HK migrants face, which will be elaborated on in the later parts.

3.3 Collective Identity

Apart from individual identity transformation, this study also aims to explore the impact of entrepreneurship on collective identity construction. As suggested by Eder (2009), collective identity, such as nationality, ethnicity or political party membership, is a shared sense of belonging to a social group. In other words, it is also a type of social identity which could be examined under the framework of social identity theory. These identities are not built on interpersonal relationships; instead, as Anderson (1983) suggested in his classic "*Imagined Community*", "even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (p.6)".

According to Anderson (1983), the establishment of the printing press, capitalism, and shared languages are essential in creating the cultural condition for collective identities to emerge. Collective identities are built on shared narratives, experiences, and symbols. For instance, national identities "are stories that combine a series of events in texts, songs and images which some people recognise as being part of their particular we, i.e. as a collective identity" (Eder,

2009, p.432). This sense of collective identity is then passed on to the next generation through stories and emotionally associated objects, such as national anthems or flags (Eder, 2009), which creates what Baldassar et al. (2017) called "generational consciousness".

In the context of migrants, Baldassar et al. (2017) found that the shared experiences of exile are essential to shaping the collective identity of the Vietnamese Diaspora in Australia. The shared traumatic experience has been transcended into a foundational narrative of their collective identity. This is then passed onto the younger generation and creates generational consciousness through "symbolic forms of transnationalism (including memory, cultural rediscovery and longing), rather than actual practices (like visits, business and associational ties)" (p.950). In another study by Sales et al. (2011), the significant landmark in London, Chinatown, has also constructed an overseas "Chineseness" by creating an ethnic space. The conglomeration of businesses (e.g. restaurants, salons, grocery shops) has become the symbolic representation of their presence in the city, which creates a sense of home and draws a clear boundary between Chinese and non-Chinese (Sales et al., 2011).

As introduced in the previous chapter, a new collective diasporic identity has emerged among HK migrants after the Anti-Extradition Bill movement in 2019 (Fong, 2022). It is in my interest to examine how entrepreneurship contributed to the development of this identity.

3.4 Entrepreneurship and Identity

What is the relationship between entrepreneurship and identity, then? In the last decade, the concept of "entrepreneurial identity" has become increasingly popular in entrepreneurship studies. This is evidenced by the growing number of academic papers published on relevant topics, from 20 in the 2000s to 131 between 2015 and 2019 (Baker & Powell, 2020). The growing interest is driven by the academic urge to understand what shapes the entrepreneurial mindset and personality, as it allows scholars to explore the emotional aspect of founders' decisions and motivation. In other words, adopting an identity lens will enable scholars to see beyond the traditional economic factors and understand why entrepreneurs make economically "irrational" choices (Gruber & MacMillan, 2017).

Through theoretical and empirical studies, founders' understanding of "who I am" and "who I want to be" has been proven essential in shaping their behaviours (M. Cardon et al., 2009; Hoang

& Gimeno, 2010), business characteristics and the strategic decisions they make (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Melonek, 2020; Powell & Baker, 2014). For example, Wagenschwanz & Grimes (2021) found that social entrepreneurs would assert their values in their new venture and react differently to organisational tension because of their identities. In their oft-cited work, Fauchart & Gruber (2011) identified three types of founder identities: Darwinians (self-interested), Communitarians (interested in those who they know) and Missionaries (interested in unknown others), and suggested these social identities would affect the initial strategic decisions of venture creation, thus "imprinting the start-ups with the founders' distinct self-concepts" (p.935).

Despite the growing attention, the relationship between identity and entrepreneurship in the existing literature is mainly unidirectional. Identity has been portrayed as a static idea that entrepreneurs could draw on for their venture creation, with very little attention being paid to the impact of entrepreneurship on identity. Yet, as illustrated earlier, identities are "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1990, p.225) and are constantly shaped and reshaped in social structures as the context changes (Erikson, 1968). This study, thereby, argues that the relationship between identity and entrepreneurship should be reciprocal: when the identity of entrepreneurs shapes their new ventures, the process also serves as a sociocultural learning experience for migrants to construct their new identity.

3.4.1 Founder Identity Theory

Several scholars have attempted to understand the dynamic relationships between entrepreneurship and identity formation. For example, as the pioneer in developing the founder identity theory, Powell & Baker (2014) suggested that entrepreneurs "use their firms as vehicles to defend who they are or to become who they want to be" (p.1406). It is argued that founders' identity preferences would impact their understanding and selection of different opportunities (Mathias & Williams, 2017), and the process of building a venture allows founders to construct new organisational roles that express and complement their social identities (Powell & Baker, 2014; Wry & York, 2019). For example, a patriot (social identity) might establish a domestic manufacturing industry, become a local manufacturer (role identity), source from local enterprises and create job opportunities in the local community. In other words, they constructed a new identity through entrepreneurship that gives them the positionality to perform what they believe their social role should do.

This perspective effectively captures the interaction between entrepreneurship and identity by linking social and role identities. However, it still does not address how entrepreneurial activities impact the social identity (patriot) itself, which is the focus of this study. As pointed out by Wagenschwanz (2021), as founders have to overcome challenges and engage in compromises when building their businesses, it might be false to assume that their identity remains unchanged in the process. There is, therefore, a significant knowledge gap that needs to be filled.

3.4.2 Migrant Identity and Acculturation: Reinvention vs Reinforcement

In the context of migrants, even fewer scholars studied the relationship between identity and entrepreneurship (see Chitac, 2021; Glinka & Brzozowska, 2015; Gomez, 2008). Building on Powell & Baker's (2014, 2017) work, Jones Christensen & Newman (2024) proposed a framework attempting to bridge acculturation theory and entrepreneurship studies (see figure 2). It is suggested that refugees use entrepreneurship as an identity tool to achieve their desired acculturation outcomes, and two identity strategies are adopted: reinvention and reinforcement.

“Reinvention” refers to the strategy that refugees consciously distance themselves from their previous identities, mindsets, identities, or realities in the entrepreneurial process (Jones Christensen & Newman, 2024). It is a conscious decision to use entrepreneurship to de-identify with their cultural heritage. In practical terms, entrepreneurs would “create businesses quite independently from any experiences or knowledge they associate with their past or the ‘refugee’ identity” (p.255). On the other hand, “reinforcement” is when refugees lean into their home culture and create ventures tied to their heritage, such as selling ethnic products from home. This may result in them isolating themselves from the dominant culture and being bounded by ethnic enclaves, which limit not only the growth and scalability of their business but also the everyday interaction and social integration with the host society (Achidi Ndofor & Priem, 2011; Altinay & Wang, 2011).

However, this framework is problematic for three reasons. First, it oversimplifies the business strategies that could be adopted by migrants. Different from the binary distinction, Chitac (2021) demonstrated that there is another possible choice of being a middleman to bridge the migrant community or home country with the host society. Entrepreneurs taking this business strategy might adopt a different acculturation strategy from the other two. Second, as Baker & Powell (2020) suggested, the assumption of a single dominant identity shaping what entrepreneurs think

and do neglects the complex interaction between multiple identities that founders engage with. While ethnic or cultural identity remains vital to migrants, they are simultaneously carrying different "identity hats", such as being a parent, an investor, a female or a Christian. These roles or social identities, coupled with other business considerations, might also influence founders' behaviours and business decisions. Finally, like other scholars, this model only focused on how identity impacts venture creation and neglected how identity evolves. This is not to say the model is inaccurate, but to say the least, it is incomplete if the aim is to capture the interaction between identity and entrepreneurship.

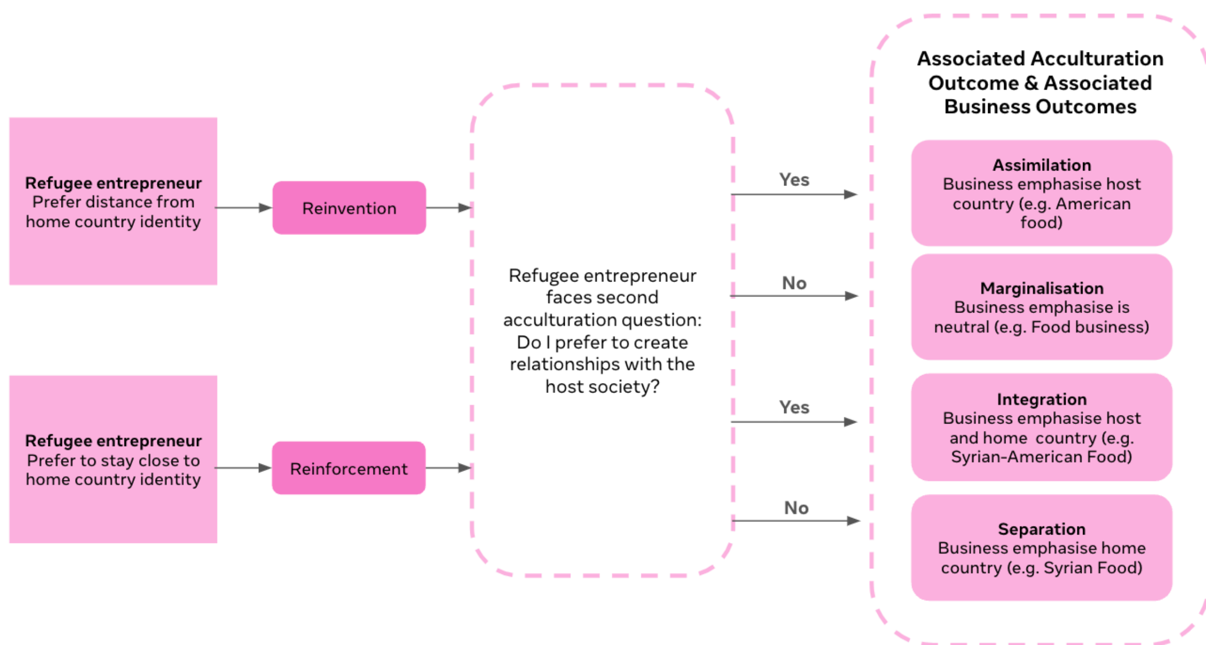


Figure 2. Framework Connecting Refugee Identity and Socialisation Preferences to Entrepreneurial Strategies and Acculturation (Source: Jones Christensen & Newman's (2024))

3.4.3 Business Strategy and Acculturation: Enclave vs Mainstream vs Bridging

Based on an empirical study with Romanian entrepreneurs in London, Chitac (2021) attempted to draw connections between migrant entrepreneurs' business strategies and their acculturation outcomes. It was found that entrepreneurship has served as a vehicle of acculturation and a sociocultural learning experience for entrepreneurs. Not only do their ventures enable them to participate actively in the host society, but the survival of their businesses also pushes them to learn about the community and understand their customers.

In addition, Chitac (2021) discovered a pattern between the entrepreneurial strategy and their acculturation experiences. Founders who engaged in mainstream businesses (targeting everyone as customers) tended to experience assimilation, whereas those in enclave businesses (targeting coethnic customers) often felt isolated from the host society. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs in middleman businesses (connecting the enclave or homeland with mainstream society served as facilitators between the two social networks, leading to a sense of integration. However, despite observing a clear pattern, Chitac (2021) did not develop a theoretical framework to explain the mechanism of identity change, leaving a significant gap in the existing knowledge.

This dissertation, thereby, will build on the above literature and examine how entrepreneurship impacts the identity transformation of migrant entrepreneurs. In the next chapter, I will describe and explain the research design.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter introduces the research design and methodology used. This study explores the dynamic relationship between entrepreneurship and identity in the context of post-2019 HK migrant entrepreneurs. As identity is a subjective construct of self-understanding (Brown, 2015), I adopted a qualitative approach to help me understand "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p.4).

As a transdisciplinary study, the research draws from both entrepreneurship and social psychology studies. The research is divided into two parts: (i) empirically examining the validity of the result and framework developed by Chitac (2021) and Jones Christensen & Newman (2024); and (ii) using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978), Acculturation Theory (Berry, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2010), and Founder Identity Theory (Powell & Baker, 2017) to analyse the findings and develop a model that depicts the dynamic relationships between entrepreneurship and identity construction.

4.1 Data collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 HK migrant entrepreneurs who relocated to the UK after 2019, supplemented with participatory observation in their stores and at three cultural festivals. By combining the two methods, I could build cases of different entrepreneurs and understand how their identities are (re)constructed when building their ventures.

4.1.1 Semi-structured interview

According to Knott et al. (2022), in-depth interviews allow individuals to articulate their understanding and interpretation of a complex issue. Conducting interviews with post-2019 HK migrant entrepreneurs helps answer the research question by exploring their perceptions and thinking processes during identity (re)construction.

All interviews were conducted in Cantonese between 12 June 2024 and 22 July 2024, each lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. 12 participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling (summarised in Table 1). They were approached through personal connections, social media or referrals from participants. It is worth noting that some participants were identified through

keyword searches like “Hong Kong + Manchester/London + entrepreneurs” on Google or in HK media coverage. This method might limit my access to those who do not explicitly identify as Hongkongers, potentially excluding those who may adopt an assimilation approach. This might impact my analysis of the relationships between entrepreneurial strategy and acculturation outcome, which I used to compare against Chitac's (2021) findings.

Participant	Industry	Type	Location	Year of arrival	Gender	Remarks
P1	Technology	Mainstream	London	2021	Female	
P2	Technology	Mainstream	London	2021	Male	
P3	Food & Beverage	Mainstream	Manchester	2022	Female	
P4	Online Retail, Food & Beverage	Mainstream & Enclave	Sheffield	2019	Female	Cofound an online retail business with P5 and own another F&B business
P5	Online Retail	Enclave	Sheffield	2021	Female	Cofound an online retail business with P4
P6	Food & Beverage	Enclave	Manchester	2021	Male	
P7	Food & Beverage	Enclave	Manchester	2021	Male	
P8	Food & Beverage	Enclave	Manchester	2021	Female	
P9	Retail	Bridging	Nottingham	2021	Female	
P10	Manufacturing	Mainstream	London	2021	Male	
P11	Construction, Marketing	Enclave & Bridging	Bristol	2020	Male	P11 owns two businesses
P12	Hairdressing and beauty treatment	Mainstream	Nottingham	2022	Male	

Table 1. Participant demographic and relevant information

The interview questions covered their motivations for starting a business, the challenges participants faced, their decision-making process, and how their identity changed during venture-building. To understand participants’ acculturation strategies, the interview guide has been structured with reference to the widely used Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA), which is a tool for evaluating migrants’ orientations toward host and original cultures (Celenk & Van De Vijver, 2011; Testa et al., 2019). It was chosen because it covers both private and public

domains, such as their participation in traditions, entertainment sources, belief in values and working habits. Additional follow-up questions were asked during the interviews, and a sample of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

4.1.2 Participatory observation

As highlighted by La Barbera (2015), collective identity emerges when outside observers recognise the similarities between individuals' belonging. Collective identity formation is, therefore, not only a subjective process but also an explicit expression that can be observed and analysed. Participant observation has been used as a supplement method to explore how HK migrants construct their identity through entrepreneurship. This method has been widely adopted in sociology and anthropology studies, as "it puts you where the action is and lets you collect data…any kind of data that you want, narratives or numbers" (Bernard, 2017, p.159). It is a data collection method and has also been used as an analytical tool, as fieldwork shapes how researchers interpret what they have observed (DeWalt, 2010).

Through participating in HK cultural festivals in the UK and spending time in participants' stores (see Table 3), I observed how these entrepreneurs interact with others, shape the origin story of their identity and become the representation of their presence in the city. All informal interviews and observations were recorded in field notes, and photos were taken at the locations. These were then consolidated into expanded notes and analysed in the data analysis stage.

Location	Time Spent	Data Collected
P3's Bar	2 hours	On-site observation notes
P7's restaurant	2 hours	On-site observation notes
Dragon Boat Festival London Market	4 hours	On-site observation notes, Non-recorded interviews
Solihull Refugee Week Event-Cultural Market	3 hours	On-site observation notes, Non-recorded interview
iFAST Urban Garden Fair	3 hours	On-site observation notes

Table 2. Summary of Participatory Observation

4.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been used to identify and analyse patterns across the dataset to understand participants' subjective experiences of identity transformation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) step-by-step framework. To begin with, the verbal

interview recordings were transcribed using Whisper AI, an automatic speech recognition system created by OpenAI that supports Cantonese. The transcripts were then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy for analysis.

After getting familiar with the data, they are then coded in two ways. The first one concerns the relationship between entrepreneurial strategy and acculturation outcome. Thus, adopting based Chitac's (2021) framework, participants are divided into three groups – “mainstream”, “ethnic”, and “middleman” entrepreneurs – according to their business strategies. Phrases that reflect their acculturation strategies, such as “I have always considered myself British Hongkonger” (P2) or “I’d prefer hanging out with Hongkongers” (P8), were then identified and coded according to Berry's (1992) acculturation framework. From this, I could match the two variables and identify their acculturation pattern.

The second way concerns the mechanism of how identity and entrepreneurship interact, which guided me to generate 34 initial codes, such as “customer feedback”, “contribution to the local community”, and “government recognition”, etc. The data were then consolidated into six emerging themes – (i) missions, (ii) intra-ethnic differentiation, (iii) relationship building, (iv) customer feedback, (v) emotional attachment and (vi) personal empowerment. These themes were then reviewed with reference to the research question and the software – Nvivo – has been used to facilitate the process and organise the emerging themes, which will be introduced in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter presents the emerging themes from the data. The first two themes, (i) business and acculturation strategies and (ii) mission, answer how their identity preferences shape their ventures. The later four themes, (iii) relationship building, (iv) customer feedback, (v) emotional attachment and (vi) personal empowerment, answer how entrepreneurship impacts the identity construction of migrant entrepreneurs.

Theme 1: Business and acculturation strategies

Following the thematic analysis, a pattern has emerged regarding the relationships between the business and acculturation strategies of migrant entrepreneurs (see Table 2). Those who engage in mainstream and ethnic businesses have demonstrated a clear preference for integration and separation, respectively. At the same time, those who served as middlemen have exhibited a mixed approach.

Mainstream enterprise: a journey of integration

Across the interviews, several participants (P1, 2, 4, 12) are engaging in mainstream business activities that target everyone as customers, including the local and migrant populations. These businesses are usually less culturally distinctive; for example, P1 and P2 are from the tech industry, which, in P1's words: *"The [marketing tech] solution I am offering has no nationality; everyone can use it. It depends on the agency to decide which market they are targeting."*

Almost all participants in this category are integrationists who embrace both their home and host cultures. When asked about their identity, they identified themselves as either "British-Hongkongers" or "Hongkongers in the UK". They are also aware of the drawbacks and benefits of both cultures and would selectively practice some cultural behaviour from both sides. As P1 explained:

> *"Is it necessary to choose one identity? I think I am both (British and Hongkonger). Because I was born in HK, I cannot change it, but I am also living here, embracing the culture and establishing my business here. I will live here for good; I am not a traveller; I am a British."*

Ethnic enterprise: a journey of separation

Across the dataset, most participants are engaging in ethnic businesses. These ventures usually demonstrate strong cultural characteristics or target their coethnic (HK or Asian community) as customers. For example, P3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are selling HK street food and books, and P11 founded a construction company to help newly arrived migrants renovate their houses.

Almost all participants in this category, except P3 and P4, have adopted separation as an acculturation strategy and have limited interest in interacting with the host society. For example, P6 and P8 mentioned that it is difficult to make friends with local people and that they would prefer to spend time with other HK migrants. As P6 stated, *"Indians hang out with Indians, Pakistanis befriend Pakistanis. It isn't easy to meet local people unless you grow up here. The language and culture are all different."*

On the other hand, P3 and P4 are more inclined towards integrationist. The former owns an HK theme bar that sells British craft beer, with 70% of its customers being local, and only 30% being HK migrants. The latter owns two different businesses — an online shop that sells HK traditional food and four British dessert bars — and she exhibits a mix of integrationist and separationist characteristics.

Middleman enterprise: a journey of mixed approach

Only two participants (P10, P11) positioned themselves as middlemen to bridge HK or China with the UK, and interestingly, the two demonstrated an opposing approach to acculturation. For instance, P11 founded a marketing agency that helps HK businesses develop UK-targeted marketing strategies. He was strongly identified as a Hongkonger and was not interested in interacting with local society.

> *P11: "I will always be a Hongkonger. I don't think there will ever be a moment when I consider myself British; even if I become a British citizen, the identity of Hongkonger will still be in my blood. I don't feel like I belong here; it feels like a long business trip with my family. When I think of home, it is and always will be HK."*

On the other hand, P10 works in the garment industry and is responsible for connecting Chinese factories with European buyers. Despite identifying himself as HK Chinese, he has shown

interest in interacting with the local community and learning about the host culture for pragmatic reasons, thus adopting an integrationist approach.

> *P10: "It's all about positioning. If I were a sourcing manager in a corporation, my identity as a Hongkonger wouldn't be particularly valuable—they would prefer working with locals. But when I started my own business and positioned myself as a bridge between Asia and Europe, my identity became an asset. I speak both languages and understand the work cultures from both sides. Who could be better suited than me?"*

Participant	Industry	Type	Location	Arrival Year	Employee	Acculturation Outcome
P1	Technology	Mainstream	London	2021	N/A	Integration
P2	Technology	Mainstream	London	2021	Local + HK	Integration
P3	Food & Beverage	Ethnic	Manchester	2022	HK	Integration
P4	Online Retail, Food & Beverage	Mainstream & Ethnic	Sheffield	2019	Local + HK	Integration
P5	Online Retail	Ethnic	Sheffield	2021	N/A	Separation
P6	Food & Beverage	Ethnic	Manchester	2021	N/A	Separation
P7	Food & Beverage	Ethnic	Manchester	2021	HK	Separation
P8	Food & Beverage	Ethnic	Manchester	2021	HK	Separation
P9	Retail	Ethnic	Nottingham	2021	N/A	Separation
P10	Manufacturing	Bridging	London	2021	Local	Integration
P11	Construction, Marketing	Ethnic & Bridging	Bristol	2020	HK	Separation
P12	Hairdressing and beauty treatment	Mainstream	Nottingham	2022	Local + HK	Integration

Table 3: Acculturation and Business strategy of participants

Theme 2: Missions

One question I asked all participants was about their motivation for starting their businesses, and the responses suggested that it is almost impossible to explain their intentions without addressing their identities. Many ethnic business owners portrayed their ventures as serving a purpose other than simply responding to market opportunities or earning a living. Two of the most common

reasons are to promote HK culture in the UK (P3, P4, P5, P6, P9) and to serve the HK migrant community (P7, P8, P11). For example, P4 and P5, who cofounded an online retail shop that sells home-made traditional HK food, stated that:

> *"We have a mission: to tell people about our stories through food. There are different stories behind our food...We want to teach our kids about HK culture and food so they will not forget their roots."*

Many participants described their businesses as "*recreating HK culture in the UK*" (P8) and suggested that this is a way for the host society to differentiate Hongkongers from pan-Chinese migrants. For example, P9 opened a bookstore specialising in HK literature, motivated by three main reasons: (i) to fill a gap in the market, (ii) to broaden the local perception of HK, and (iii) to maintain connections with HK as she plans to return someday. She even put up a sign outside her shop to introduce local slang and fun facts from HK. In her own words:

> *"HK is not just about Chinese takeaway or what you find in a Chinese grocery store, not Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee [two famous Chinese movie stars from HK]; we have our unique culture, movies, and books…We are nothing like those from mainland China, Korea, or Japan. We are who we are."*

In other words, their venture becomes a tool for them to express and define who they are, and part of their identity is built on their differentiation from the pan-Chinese migrant community. In doing so, they also redefine HK by utilising different symbols to construct the fundamental narrative of their identity. For instance, the owner of the HK-themed bar P3 combined brick walls from Manchester with the iconic neon signs and tiles from 1980s HK:

> "*Our idea is to bring back the essence of HK from its golden days. The tiles and neon signs you see are iconic symbols from the 80s. The phrase '花樣年華' [meaning 'the best time of life'] reflects our belief that HK's peak was during that era… Although I was born after 1997, the HK I cherish is the one influenced by a blend of Chinese and Western values, reminiscent of the British rule."*

In her own words, she wanted to maintain her identity as a Hongkonger while integrating into British society, and this intention is manifested through her bar, "*At first glance, they [the decoration] might seem like an odd combination, but it's a blend of the two cultures coming together.*"

Their identity as Hongkongers shaped not only their business idea but also how they sought opportunities and structured their companies. For instance, P11 owns a construction company and a marketing agency that only serves and hires HK migrants. He presents his ventures as platforms to connect and support newly arrived migrants by providing job opportunities. The food truck owner, P6, would also rely on the market knowledge provided by the migrant network and identify locations with more HK migrants when seeking opportunities. In his words, *"We are Hongkongers. Of course, it is easier to serve Hongkongers."*

The only two exceptional cases are P1 and P2, both working in the tech industry. Instead of associating their business with their Hongkonger identity, they presented their businesses as actively responding to market opportunities (e.g. seeing the potential of blockchain technology) and accommodating their role as parents (e.g. maintaining a flexible schedule to work and take care of their kids). In P2's words, "*The fintech industry only cares about what you do, not who you are.*"

Theme 3: Relationship-building

The following four themes concern how being an entrepreneur impacted their identity construction process as a migrant. Across the interviews, many participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) mentioned that entrepreneurship has been a channel for them to build relationships. These connections could be customers, employees, suppliers, business partners, or owners of neighbouring shops. For example, P1, as a first-time entrepreneur, stated that the stress of running her own business has compelled her to join different social events and expand her network for collaboration opportunities.

> *P1: "If it weren't for doing business, I might have lived an ordinary life here and would only know one-twentieth of the people compared to now. You simply don't have a channel or a position to meet so many people."*

Although most participants noted the cultural similarities between HK and the UK due to its colonial history, several also observed differences in work culture through their daily interactions. They reported adjustments in their working habits to fit in. One of the most common changes was developing greater patience when dealing with employees or suppliers. As P1 expressed:

> *"It's also a cultural learning. What's the rush? Especially when doing business with the British, I might have set the project timeline, but it just doesn't always pan out… There's nothing you can do; you have to get used to it and learn to relax."*

Sometimes, the impact extends beyond the workspace into their personal values. For example, P4, who owns four local dessert bars, shared much about what she learned from her local employees and how her parenting style changed over the past few years.

> *P4: "When I was in HK, I believed strongly that children should learn everything and be successful. But after moving here, I saw that my employees, who were quite young, started working part-time at sixteen years old. I realised it's okay if they don't excel academically or complete college. It's fine if they don't become lawyers or doctors."*

These networks are not necessarily integration-oriented. Those who target HK migrants as customers also use their businesses as a platform to build connections within the migrant enclave. P11, who owns a construction company that hires HK migrants, mentioned that his goal is to "*gather a group of Hongkongers who are currently scattered across the country*." These connections would eventually form a migrant network, providing market knowledge or opportunities and enabling migrants to practice their heritage culture together (Lassalle et al., 2020). For some participants whose businesses bridge HK and the UK, entrepreneurship also links them and their homeland. As a bookshop owner who sells HK books in the UK, P9 frequently interacts with suppliers in HK. To a certain degree, these daily interactions have strengthened her connection with her homeland and reinforced her identity as a Hongkonger.

> *P9: "One of the reasons why I wanted to open this bookstore is to stay in sync with HK. I think this will make me feel less distanced from HK. Imagine going*

back to HK 30 years later, but I haven't read or consumed anything from HK; there will be a 30-year gap between me and HK. But now, I can narrow this gap by reading and selling books from HK."

Theme 4: Emotional attachment

Another frequently mentioned theme is the emotional attachment to their businesses, particularly among those who own brick-and-mortar stores. The distinction between P4 and P5 serves as a good example. The two co-founded an online retail shop selling HK home food in 2022, while P4 also owns four dessert bars catering to local customers. When asked about their identity, P5 immediately answered with "Hongkonger," whereas P4 hesitated before stating, "*If someone asks, I'd say I'm a Hongkonger, but I'd also mention that I'm currently living in the UK."* When later asked if she considers Sheffield as her home, she said yes and elaborated:

P4: "My dessert bars are here, and my children are also studying here. You would expect them to grow up here. It's like a plant being transplanted and slowly growing here, and it is difficult to remove it from here."

Interestingly, the motivation behind her dessert bars was mainly business considerations, i.e. attracting the biggest population here, but in her words, her dessert bars have become her roots and the reasons for her to stay in Sheffield instead of considering moving elsewhere. Similarly, the bar owner P3 described her business as her baby, as she has invested a great amount of time, money and ideas in it. The bar is not only a business to her; it also carries her identity and expectations for the future and represents who she wants to be.

P3: "I spent most of my time building relationships in the shop and with my customers. I live here, and my bar is here, too, which has truly made me feel more connected and at home in the UK. But I struggled with this. I was born and raised in HK and spent the last 20 years building my identity as a Hongkonger. It's impossible to erase my past, but at the same time, I know I won't go back."

Her answer is one of the few that depicts how entrepreneurial experiences confused her about her identity, which reflected an ongoing acculturation process. Interestingly, she started the bar by intentionally combining the two cultures, and her entrepreneurial experience has reinforced this

strategy and strengthened her sense of belonging towards Manchester. In contrast, P4 started her local dessert bars for business reasons, and the experience has changed her acculturation strategy from separationist to more inclined towards integration.

Theme 5: Customer feedback

During the interviews, many participants (P3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12), particularly those who sell cultural-related products, shared how they have received customer feedback and have had to adjust their ideas to attract local customers. Despite the comments being directed towards their products, many participants perceived the feedback as an indicator of their acceptance in the host society.

> *P3: "I felt disrespected when people criticised us without knowing what HK food really was. We tried to be authentic, but they did not respect my culture…On the other hand, many locals also thank us for bringing a different life to the local neighbourhood. Some even described us as a blessing to Manchester or called us a 'cultural impact', which makes me very happy."*

While the acknowledgement made them feel included in the host society, the negative feedback created a sense of otherness. It pressured the migrant entrepreneurs to abandon their original working style and adapt to the host society, eventually contributing to their behavioural integration. Meanwhile, positive feedback from HK customers also fostered a sense of collectiveness and community. As the restaurant owner P8 shared, "*I really enjoy serving Hongkongers. We speak the same language, share a love for the same dishes, and support each other. It feels like we're part of the same community.*" Interestingly, while there is negative feedback from HK customers, it does not lead to any reflection on identity. Instead, participants often justify it by saying, "*Hongkongers are just picky, but that's part of who we are*" (P6).

Theme 6: Personal empowerment

Lastly, several interviewees (P1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12) expressed a sense of empowerment as entrepreneurs in the UK. This empowerment extends beyond financial independence; it's also about exercising their agency to tackle the deskilling that many migrants face (Man, 2004). For instance, P11 mentioned that he had experienced a long period of depression and felt worthless until he started his construction company:

"When I first came to the UK, I didn't know what I was doing; I just kept washing dishes in the kitchen for 11 hours a day. My only mission was to finish them quickly without breaking them, and I started questioning why I moved here. But now, I can finally apply my skills and experience to something meaningful…I am much happier and feel worthy and less lost."

The impact of entrepreneurship could also take a gendered perspective. For example, as a female immigrant, P1 highlighted how entrepreneurship empowered and liberated her from her family roles:

"Being an entrepreneur keeps me connected to the market and the world. I am not only a housewife who stays home and takes care of my kids, my life is more than that… I don't want my life to be all about the price of chicken thighs at Sainsbury. To a certain degree, I think being an entrepreneur is about self-satisfaction."

In other words, her role as an entrepreneur has impacted her social role as a mother. This is important because women are usually seen as dependent on their husbands and are reduced in their family roles during migration (Man, 2004). While this is not within the scope of the study, it will be interesting to explore the intersectionality between gender, acculturation, and entrepreneurship in future studies. In the next chapter, I will contextualise the findings in the literature and explain how they contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This study aims to understand the dynamic relationship between identity construction and entrepreneurship among post-2019 HK migrants in the UK. The key findings indicate that, while migrant entrepreneurs use their ventures to construct their new identity, entrepreneurship also serves as a vehicle of acculturation, aiding them in navigating their place within the host society.

In this chapter, I will first illustrate how entrepreneurship is driven by multiple identities, then explain how being an entrepreneur impacts migrants' identity construction and the correlations between business strategies and acculturation outcomes. In addition, it is found that being an entrepreneur could help migrants tackle the social and psychological stress associated with acculturation, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being. Based on the findings, I will conclude the chapter by proposing a model that depicts the reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurship and identity construction in the context of post-2019 HK migrant entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship as a multiple identity-driven activity

The first significant finding concerns the impact of identity on venture creation. The findings indicate that migrant entrepreneurs often leverage their identities to shape their ventures. As Powell & Baker's (2014) illustrated, entrepreneurs' understanding of "who I am" critically influences every decision in the business-building process. For instance, the identity of Hongkongers motivated P8 to exploit opportunities in offering HK street food (aligns with Mathias & Williams, 2017), led P11 to prioritise hiring coethnics (aligns with Arrighetti et al., 2017), and influenced how P3 responded to feedback about her product (aligns with Grimes, 2018; Wagenschwanz & Grimes, 2021).

The close connections between founders' identity preferences and their ventures in literature is supported by the participants' personal experiences. For instance, bookstore owner P9 explicitly stated that her desire to maintain connections with her homeland motivated her to open a bookstore specialising in HK literature. Despite the limited profit margins, her identity as a Hongkonger and her passion have driven her to sustain the business instead of pursuing other more profitable opportunities. Similarly, P3 mentioned that the concept behind their HK-themed bar, which sells local British craft beer, was to "*integrate into this place while also preserving our unique identity*" and "*turn that into an advantage and make us stand out from the*

competition". As a result, her identity preference as an integrationist was expressed through their product (selling HK food and British beer) and the decoration (a mix of HK's signature neon sign and Manchester's red bricks). This aligns with Jones Christensen & Newman's (2024) "reinvention vs. reinforcement" model, which suggests that migrant entrepreneurs who want to reinforce their original identity would engage in ethnic or cultural-related businesses.

Unlike what Jones Christensen & Newman (2024) suggested, however, the relationship between migrants' home and host identities is not always the primary factor driving their entrepreneurial decisions. Instead, various factors could influence their actions, including market opportunities, risk considerations, and other identities. For example, the marketing tech company founder P1 emphasised that she still sees part of herself as a Hongkonger, yet her company demonstrates no ethnic or cultural elements. When she established the company, her decisions were guided by several factors: (i) the need for flexible working hours and location to care for her children, (ii) the desire to maintain an online, service-based business model to minimise operational risks and costs, (iii) her prior experience and ability, and (iv) collaboration with her business partner. In this case, her identity as a mother, an investor, an experienced tech consultant, and a business partner and the responsibilities attached to these identities were more prominent than her identity as a Hongkonger. This finding aligns with Powell & Baker's (2014) argument that scholars should not assume a single identity as dominant in shaping founders' thoughts and actions, as "[t]he close intertwining of life and entrepreneurship makes it likely that a number of identities will become salient in the founder's day-to-day work activities" (Baker & Powell, 2020, p.8).

In other words, Jones Christensen & Newman's (2024) framework oversimplified the situation that migrants have to face. While their ethnic and cultural identities remain vital to migrants (Berry, 1997), they simultaneously wear multiple "identity hats", which are organised in a hierarchy in their everyday entrepreneurial work (Baker & Powell, 2020). Thus, scholars must not neglect the complexity of entrepreneurs' identities if they are to understand fully what drives their behaviours and passions.

Entrepreneurship as a vehicle of acculturation

The second key finding concerns how entrepreneurship impacts migrant identity transformation. My findings indicate that all participants have experienced different levels of behavioural or

cognitive adjustment during their venture creation, such as adopting the British work culture (P1), adapting their products to local preferences (P12) or developing a sense of belonging to the UK (P4). Building on that, I argue that entrepreneurship has served as a vehicle of acculturation for migrants to reconstruct their identity (Chitac, 2021). The process happens through three primary mechanisms: (i) relationship building, (ii) emotional attachment and (iii) customer feedback. Through daily interaction with the local society, migrant entrepreneurs not only learn about the benefits and drawbacks of the host culture (Berry, 1992, 1997) but also shape their understanding of "who is one of us" by social categorisation and comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Behavioural perspective: Socio-cultural learning

As illustrated in the previous chapter, being an entrepreneur allows migrants to build connections with locals or their coethnics. Through these connections, migrants could acquire the necessary skills to engage in the new cultural environment. The simplest example is language skills, which, as Masgoret & Colleen (2006) suggested, is the core of performing daily tasks and sociocultural adjustment. In the case of P1, her social identity as an entrepreneur has urged her to expand her network among local or coethnic entrepreneurs. In the process, she learned more about not only the language but also the rules, social norms, and values, such as the "work-life balance" culture in the UK. While not all participants chose to adopt new values, research suggests that understanding and awareness of cultural and value differences are crucial for adaptation outcomes (Ward & Searle, 1991).

It is also interesting to see how participants learn from their local counterparts. For example, the hair salon owner, P12, shared an incident in which an HK customer complained about him missing after showing up without reservation.

> *P12: "I have learnt that the local hairdressers would just take a day off if they are not in the mood or have other things to do. This would never happen in HK; we must strictly stick to the stated opening hours. I think, as new migrants, we have to learn about cultural differences after we arrive in the UK."*

Adopting an identity lens, the learning process has created an identity prototype for these entrepreneurs. In other words, migrants would learn "what it means to be British" and "how to act like a British" through building relationships and interacting with others. This echoes Chitac's (2021) findings that suggest entrepreneurship as a socio-cultural learning process.

Cognitive Perspective: Social Classification and Sense of Belonging

Through their everyday entrepreneurial activities, migrant entrepreneurs learned about the cultural differences between them and others in society, which, as Stets & Burke (2000) suggested, is the key to constructing the boundary between in-groups and out-groups. In other words, migrant entrepreneurs consistently renegotiate the boundary between "us" and "them" when interacting with the broader host society.

One significant mechanism is customer feedback. As Grimes (2018) illustrated in his work, founders' creative identity is linked with their identity, and they respond to feedback differently depending on their psychological ownership of their ideas. Despite the criticism directed at the creative ideas or products, such feedback would still trigger founders "to not only revise their ideas, but also reflect on their identities" (p.1703). As illustrated in the previous chapter, negative feedback from the host society, especially those against cultural products, would trigger a reaction from founders to defend their ideas and identity. The process would create a sense of otherness and highlight the differences between migrants and the receiving community. As P3 emphasised in the interview, when local customers criticised her food, she would feel disrespected and pressured to give up her authentic self. On the other hand, positive comments and local recognition made participants feel more belonging to the community, as P2 illustrated:

> *"Being an entrepreneur makes me feel like part of this country. This is not only because you have to fill in the forms and register as British, but also because you will meet people who would appreciate your courage to start a business and respect your identity as an entrepreneur. It's like I am contributing to the country as a part of it."*

Another key mechanism impacting the cognitive identification of migrant entrepreneurs is the development of strong emotional attachments to their ventures. For example, P3 and P4 described their businesses as their babies and roots in the UK. As noted by Cardon et al. (2005),

this metaphor is common among entrepreneurs, indicating a deep connection and attachment to their ventures. Like a parent-child relationship, founders may view their businesses as part of their identity and feel personally responsible for their success or failure, especially to keep their staff employed. Establishing a brick-and-mortar store, in particular, can foster a sense of belonging within the local community. For instance, P4 mentioned that her dessert bars are one of the main reasons she continues to live in Sheffield. This aligns with what Nicolais et al. (2021) described as “place attachment”—an emotional bond individuals form with a place, which can play a fundamental role in shaping their sense of self. While this area remains underexplored in current literature, the connection between establishing brick-and-mortar businesses and migrant acculturation is valuable for future research.

Entrepreneurship strategy and Acculturation outcome

Based on the above finding, one possible speculation is that different business strategies would have impacted the outcome of acculturation. While a pattern has emerged from my interviews, it is interesting that my findings have revealed a different acculturation pattern compared to Chitac's (2021) observations among Romanian entrepreneurs in London (see Table 4). For instance, while she suggests that mainstream entrepreneurs are more likely to be assimilationists who abandon their home culture, my research indicates that they tend to adopt an integrationist approach, embracing both their home and host cultures. For those involved in bridging enterprises, rather than being solely integrationists as Chitac (2021) suggested, they demonstrated a mixed separation/integration approach while showing a strong identification with their identity as Hongkongers. In general, post-2019 HK migrant entrepreneurs are eager to preserve their heritage identity and cultural practices.

Several factors may explain these differences. First, the duration of stay in the UK varies. While Chitac (2021) did not specify the average residency time of her participants, her study included Romanians who had been in the UK for over ten years. In contrast, all participants in my research arrived after 2019 and are still in the early stages of acculturation, when their connection to their heritage culture is stronger Berry (1997).

	Mainstream enterprise	Ethnic enterprise	Bridging enterprise
Romanian Entrepreneurs	Assimilationist (Fully embrace host culture)	Separationist (Fully embrace home culture)	Integrationist (Embrace both home and host culture)
HK Entrepreneurs	Integrationist (Embrace both home and host culture)	Separationist (Fully embrace home culture with little interest to interact with locals)	Mixed approach depending on their target customers

Table 4. Comparison with Chitac's (2021) findings

Second, environmental factors differ. Chitac's (2021) study focused on London, a super-diverse, global city, while some of my participants are from cities like Manchester and Nottingham. As P1 indicated, it is easier to integrate in London than in other UK cities, as "*London is a metropolitan with all different kinds of people, so isolation or discrimination is less likely to happen.*" As suggested by Berry (1997), the acculturation experience is different when the perception of acceptance by the receiving society is different.

Third, the context of their migration matters. As explained in the previous chapter, the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill movement was a critical motivation for their migration and is strongly associated with their identity (Kan et al., 2023). The BN(O) visa scheme was also established due to the deteriorating political environment in HK. As several participants emphasised, "*We came here through the BN(O) visa scheme, and being a Hongkonger is the only reason we can enjoy this special offer*" (P7). Thus, their presence in the UK paradoxically serves as a constant reminder of their heritage identity.

Finally, cultural distance plays a role. Migrants from regions like Asia often face more challenges in cross-cultural transitions than those from Europe (Furnham, 1982; Masgoret & Colleen, 2006). While Hong Kong's culture has been heavily influenced by its British colonial past, Hongkongers have continued to practice Chinese traditions and have experienced over two decades of development since the 1997 handover. This blend of influences has created an autonomous cultural identity, distinct from both Chinese and British cultures (Mathews, 1997). Additionally, non-white and non-European immigrants might experience acculturation differently due to their distinct physical features from those of Europeans (Bhatia & Ram, 2001).

Although the UK has a diverse population, HK migrants still perceive themselves as different from the British; as P8 mentioned, "*It's not just about whether you see yourself as one of them; it's also about whether they see you as one of them, and we will never look like them.*"

Regardless of the reasons, the differences between the two groups of migrant entrepreneurs highlighted the complexity and the contextualised nature of acculturation. On the one hand, Chitac (2021) and I both observed a correlation between business strategy and acculturation outcomes. On the other hand, the process is impacted by various factors and could not be examined without considering the context and background. While we cannot generalise our findings to all migrant groups, it is worthwhile for future studies to continue exploring this field.

Ethnic entrepreneurship as a symbol of collective identity

Previous sections have explored how entrepreneurship influences individuals to identify with particular social identities, such as Hongkongers or British. However, my findings suggest that, as individuals express their ethnic identity through entrepreneurial ventures, they also actively reshape the meaning and content of that collective identity. In other words, they are redefining the "group narrative" of overseas Hongkongers, including the group's origin, history, present status, and future trajectory (Ashmore et al., 2004). For example, P3's bar aims to resemble the "good old days" of HK by incorporating iconic elements such as neon signs and green-white tiles, which were widely used in the 1980s. This process involves a selection of symbols to represent her vision of HK. In this case, P3 highlighted the colonial history and downplayed the Chinese aspects of the HK diasporic identity; these elements become the social representations of her version of the group story (Ashmore et al., 2004).

While individuals could develop different versions of the group's origin story, it becomes a collective action when many HK entrepreneurs engage in similar practices (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For instance, in food markets, political and cultural symbols such as umbrellas (a symbol of resistance as HK protestors have used it against the police) and the Lion Rock (representing HK's success during the colonial period) are frequently employed as decorative elements. There were also products related to the Anti-Extradition Bill movement in 2019. In doing so, these entrepreneurs unconsciously strengthened the shared experience of the movement and contributed to an evolving narrative about their presence in the UK. This is evidenced by P1's

experiences among HK migrants: "*It's not something we openly discuss, but we all know what brought us here. Hongkongers have a strong sense of empathy towards each other, and they're always willing to lend a hand when they know you arrived after 2019.*"

Figure 3. Political decoration at the HK Cultural Festival (left)
Figure 4. Political products at the HK Cultural Festival, such as bags with calligraphy art writing "HK fighting" or the Lion and Dragon flag (right)

Apart from reshaping the internal narrative of collective identity, these Hong Kong food markets and restaurants also represent the Hongkonger presence in the city. These ethnic businesses mark specific urban spaces with "Hongkongness", where migrants can feel at home while shaping how the host society perceives their existence. This aligns with what Sales et al. (2011) illustrated with the example of Chinatown in London, in which they suggested that the existence of such representation in urban space is essential to maintain boundaries between Chinese and non-Chinese. In this case, the boundaries are between post-2019 HK migrants and others. Interestingly, several participants mentioned that they would bring their children to the HK markets to "*teach them about HK food and culture*" (P2). In other words, these cultural festivals also served as a carrier to pass on "generational consciousness" towards their collective identity

(Baldassar et al., 2017). This will be an exciting area to explore in the future with a longitudinal study.

Entrepreneurship as a strategy to manage acculturative stress

An unexpected finding of this study, which may have the most practical implications, was the role of entrepreneurship in alleviating acculturative stress. As suggested by Berry (1992), migrants often encounter specific stressors during the acculturation process, stemming from life events that present significant challenges. Stress occurs when individuals struggle to manage these challenges by simply adjusting their behaviour. Many factors, such as homesickness, culture shock, identity transformation, perceived discrimination, and language barriers, can trigger acculturative stress (Gebregergis, 2018; Sam & Berry, 2010).

During the interviews, several participants reported encountering different stressors upon arrival, including financial pressure due to reduced income, feelings of self-deprecation resulting from deskilling, and challenges in interacting with locals due to language barriers. P11, in particular, described experiencing deep depression and frustration before establishing his ventures. He shared:

> *"Before I came here, I was in senior management at a media company. Then suddenly, I found myself working as a dishwasher in the UK. Can you imagine how frustrating that was? It wasn't just about the money; it was the complete lack of a sense of accomplishment. I started questioning my decisions—why did I come here? Is this worth it? It was a painful process, but the experience also pushed me to start my own business and hire other Hong Kong migrants in the same position. Now, I'm truly happy because I can finally use my skills for something meaningful and enjoyable. I feel a sense of purpose now, and I've come to terms with myself."*

In other words, P11's businesses not only helped him achieve financial independence but also allowed him to continue in the same profession as in Hong Kong. As suggested by González-González & Bretones (2013), this "generates a perception of continuity in their lives that have been disrupted by migration" (p.639). Additionally, through his venture, P11 was able to transcend his stressful experience into motivation and provide opportunities for his fellow

Hongkongers. On the one hand, he can recruit talented and educated labour that the mainstream market rejects. On the other hand, it has also given him a purpose to serve in the UK – to sustain the business and keep his fellow Hongkongers employed.

This is not to say entrepreneurship is without stress; quite the contrary, participants also shared the challenges they faced in the process, such as the language barrier, unfamiliar market context and tax regulations. The hairdresser, P12, discussed the difficulties in adapting to a different haircut style, to the point of feeling like "*giving up on myself and what I have learned*." Despite these challenges, they view entrepreneurship as both challenging and empowering. While they had to deal with the stress of running the business, many mentioned that it differed from the stress they experienced when first arriving in the UK. As P6 described, creating a venture helped them become who they aspired to be and "*take ownership of my life.*"

It is also interesting to note that being an entrepreneur impacts gender roles as well. As indicated by existing literature, female migrants are more prone to be deskilled and marginalised due to gendered and racialised institutional policies and practices in the host society (Man, 2004). Despite their qualifications and education, women—especially in Chinese families—often have to juggle domestic responsibilities, compromising their careers due to the high cost of childcare and domestic service (Ngan, 2024). However, as illustrated by P1, starting her own business has liberated her from the traditional roles of a mother and a wife. Although she still needs to care for her children, her venture keeps her in touch with the market and continues to pursue her goal as a professional woman. This corresponds well with Abbasian & Bildt's (2009) findings that suggested entrepreneurship as a tool to empower migrant women.

Therefore, migrant entrepreneurship is more than just an economic activity; it also helps migrants find their place in a new environment, allowing them to exercise agency and empowerment. This finding challenges the common notion in the literature (such as Sam & Berry, 2010) that adaptation means integration or conforming to the new culture. Instead, entrepreneurship enables migrants to carve out their own space in the host society, becoming who they want to be. For those who integrate with the dominant culture, mainstream entrepreneurship enables them to expand their social networks, learn from the local community, and develop a sense of belonging. For those who prefer to maintain their original identity, engaging in ethnic business creates a safe space to celebrate their cultural heritage and build

connections with other Hong Kong migrants, eventually becoming their social capital in the host society (Jones Christensen & Newman, 2024).

The reciprocal relationship between identity and entrepreneurship

Combining the above findings, it seems to present a complex scenario that raises a "chicken or egg" question: Do migrants' identity preferences shape their entrepreneurial ventures, or does entrepreneurship drive their identity reconstruction? This study argues that the relationship is reciprocal – while entrepreneurs draw upon their identities to build their ventures, the experiences also serve as a socio-cultural learning process for them to navigate their position in the society.

As summarised in Figure 3, the upper pink section, based on Jones Christensen & Newman's (2024) model, illustrates how migrants' identity preferences influence their ventures. The green section reflects my findings, suggesting that additional factors, such as business considerations and other salient identities (e.g., being a parent or vegetarian), also shape their entrepreneurial activities. Through daily business operations, migrant entrepreneurs interact with the host society or ethnic enclave, which confronts them with the question, "Do you maintain the same feeling towards your host or home identity?" Under the influence of three key mechanisms - relationship building, customer feedback, and emotional attachment - they would either *reinforce* or *redirect* their acculturation strategies. Moreover, entrepreneurship can mitigate acculturative stress through personal empowerment. Finally, these experiences lead migrants to reconsider and adopt one of Berry's (1992) four acculturation strategies, as highlighted in yellow.

One good example of *reinforcement* is the Hong Kong-themed bar owner P3. She started her acculturation journey as an integrationist, aiming to "*combine Hong Kong and the British culture."* During the venture creation process, she built connections with local customers, learned about social norms and values, and eventually constructed a new integrated identity as a "Hongkonger in the UK", aligning with her original identity preference. In other words, she has reinforced and executed her acculturation strategy through entrepreneurship.

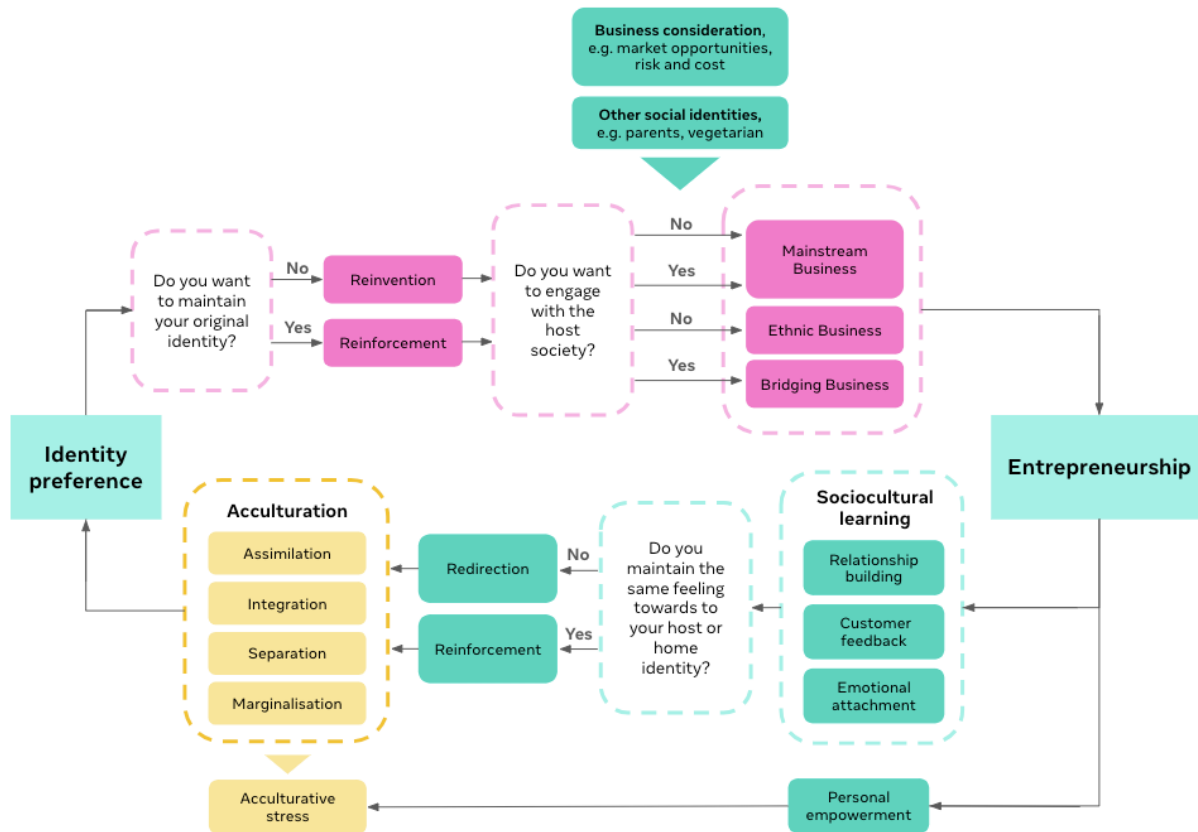


Figure 5. The reciprocal relationship between identity and entrepreneurship (Source: author's observation, Berry's (1992) acculturation framework and Jones Christensen & Newman's (2024) model)

While most participants experienced reinforcement, a few *redirected* their acculturation strategies during their entrepreneurial journey. For instance, P4, who began as a separationist, shifted towards integration as she opened her local dessert bar. Initially, she strongly identified as a Hongkonger and aimed to maintain that identity, but business considerations led her to open a local, rather than culturally distinct, dessert bar. Through running the business, she encountered cultural differences and developed a connection to both her work and the city. This experience fostered a sense of belonging to the UK and moved her from separation to integration. These shifts, once again, demonstrate that acculturation strategies are not binary choices but somewhat fluid and subject to change due to external factors (Berry, 1992, 1997).

In summary, this model has demonstrated the reciprocal dynamic between identity and entrepreneurship. This answers the call from Grimes (2018) and Wagenschwanz (2021) to

understand how entrepreneurial activities impact founders' social identity. In the next chapter, I will conclude the study, discuss the limitations and suggest potential ideas for future studies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, Limitations and Future Study

This research explores the role of entrepreneurship in the identity reconstruction of post-2019 HK migrants in the UK and examines the dynamic relationship between identity and entrepreneurship. To achieve this, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 HK migrant entrepreneurs and carried out participant observations at three different HK cultural festivals in the UK. This chapter summarises the findings and conclusions, outlines the key contributions and implications, and discusses the study's limitations and potential directions for future research.

Findings and Originality

The main research question of this study is: "*What is the relationship between entrepreneurship and identity construction among post-2019 HK migrants in the UK?*" The key findings indicate that, while migrant entrepreneurs' identity preferences shape their ventures, entrepreneurship also serves as a vehicle of acculturation, aiding them in navigating their position within the host society.

Based on my findings and building on Jones Christensen & Newman's (2024) work, I proposed a model to illustrate this reciprocal relationship. Entrepreneurship is shaped by multiple identities of the founders, including their ethnic identity as Hongkongers or British, along with other social identities (e.g., parents or vegetarians). Through their entrepreneurial activities, new migrants engage in a sociocultural learning process, renegotiating the boundary between 'us' (in-group) and 'them' (out-group) within the host country. This typically occurs through three mechanisms: (i) relationship building, (ii) emotional attachment, and (iii) customer feedback. Throughout this process, they also reshape and reinforce the collective identity narrative — redefining what it means to be an overseas Hongkonger by highlighting or hiding specific aspects of their origin story. As a result, entrepreneurs might change their attitude towards their host or home culture and *reinforce* or *redirect* their acculturation strategy. In addition, it is found that entrepreneurship empowers migrants to exercise their agency, reducing the social and psychological stress associated with acculturation and ultimately improving their overall well-being.

Contribution and Implications

This study contributes to the current work in three ways. First, I have identified a reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurship and migrant identity construction. This answers the call from Grimes (2018) and Wagenschwanz (2021) to understand how entrepreneurial activities impact founders' social identity. The finding opens a door for future study on founder identity theory and could be used to explore how entrepreneurs change and evolve as their careers progress. It will also be interesting to see how their impacted identity or beliefs, in return, shape their following ventures.

Second, the findings expanded our understanding of migrant entrepreneurship and highlighted its role in migrants' socio-cultural learning process and its impact on mitigating acculturative stress. This challenges the existing economic-driven narrative of migrant entrepreneurship and might influence how we measure the success of these entrepreneurs in the future. This could initiate a meaningful discussion about how incubators or government funds measure their impact when investing in migrant entrepreneurs.

Finally, this study contributes to HK studies by providing empirical data on how the post-2019 HK diaspora uses their ventures to redefine their collective identity. These insights are essential for future studies on the diaspora's development and the complex interplay between Hongkongness, Chineseness, and Britishness.

Limitations and Future Study

This study has two critical limitations related to the sampling method and study period. First, as some participants were identified using keyword searches such as 'Hong Kong + Manchester or London + entrepreneurs,' the study may have excluded individuals who do not explicitly identify as Hongkongers or who have adopted an assimilation approach. This may affect my analysis of the relationship between entrepreneurial strategy and acculturation outcomes, which I compared to Chitac's (2021) findings. Second, the current findings rely heavily on participants' subjective narratives. Due to time constraints, I was unable to conduct a longitudinal study to observe and measure changes over time. While I attempted to remain neutral during the interviews, my role as a researcher and identity as a Hongkonger may have influenced participants' narratives,

particularly in relation to their feelings towards both home and host cultures, which are crucial to this study.

My findings suggest two potential areas for future research. First, while this study has demonstrated how entrepreneurship empowers migrants and reduces acculturative stress, further exploration is needed to understand the mechanisms behind this and how different business strategies might influence these outcomes. This could offer valuable insights into how governments can better support migrant through entrepreneurship. Second, building on the founder identity theory, it would be useful to examine how entrepreneurship affects other social identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, or religion. As Wagenschwanz (2021) illustrated, founders must overcome challenges and compromise during venture creation, which makes it unrealistic to assume that identities remain static. By exploring the reciprocal relationship between various identities and entrepreneurship, scholars can bring research on founder identity closer to real-world dynamics.

As I am writing this dissertation, the UK has witnessed a series of anti-immigration riots across several cities, highlighting the urgent need for the government to address the challenges and opportunities brought by immigration. In the face of rising right-wing extremism, public debates and policy interventions are increasingly cantered on how migrants assimilate into host-country values and contribute to society. Yet, as pointed out by Hall (2021), this narrow discourse neglects the significant cultural and economic contributions of migrants and overlooks their experiences of discrimination. This study demonstrates that migrant entrepreneurship offers more than economic benefits; it provides a pathway for addressing the social challenges that migrants face. It is, therefore, essential for scholars and policymakers to further investigate the complexities surrounding migrant entrepreneurship and to develop policies that better support their success, ultimately promoting a more inclusive society.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide

Target: Post-2019 Hong Kong migrant entrepreneurs in the UK

Duration: 1.5 to 2 hours

Motivation of migrations

- When, how and why did you move to the UK?

Entrepreneurial activities

- How did you start your business?
- Why did you become an entrepreneur?
- What are the challenges and opportunities you encountered?
- Describe your business and your strategies
- Who is your target customers? Why?
- Would you consider hiring locals or people from other ethnic groups?

Individual identity construction

- When engaging in entrepreneurial activities in the UK, how do you interact with Hong Kong migrants or locals? Is there any difference? If so, how?
- What role did entrepreneurship play in your identity transformation process in the UK?
- (if applicable) How is your entrepreneurial experience in the UK different from Hong Kong? How does that contribute to your identity change?
- What does it mean to be an entrepreneur in the UK?
- How would you identify yourselves? Entrepreneurs? Hongkongers or British?
- How often do you participate in your native cultural traditions or British mainstream cultural traditions?
- Do you enjoy social activities with Hong Kong migrants like yourself, with British people or both?
- How comfortable are you when working with people of the same native culture as you and with typical British?
- Do you enjoy entertainment from Hong Kong or here in the UK?
- How important is it to maintain or develop the cultural practices of my native culture and or British culture?

Collective identity construction

- Do you agree that there is a collective identity shared by you and other Post-2019 Hong Kong migrant entrepreneurs in the UK?
- Do you think there is an in-group or out-group? How do you differentiate them?
- What role did entrepreneurship play in constructing this collective identity? How did you realise there is such a shared identity?
- How is your relationship with other entrepreneurs from mainland China?
- How is your relationship with Hong Kong migrant entrepreneurs who arrived before 2019?