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**Estrangement, Resettlement & Community: A Qualitative Study of Post-2019 HK  
Diasporic Young Adults at a Chinese Canadian Church**

by

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## **Abstract**

Many Hong Kong citizens have emigrated from Hong Kong (HK) to countries such as Canada after the 2019 political unrests. The HK diaspora have their own narratives in leaving their communities to settle in a foreign country. This is not an easy journey as they leave work, friends, family, and face the challenges of adapting to a totally new country, customs and people while carrying their past experiences. This current phenomenon challenges churches who are receiving the HK diaspora to be equipped in supporting their resettlement in Canada.

This project involved a qualitative case study at a Chinese Canadian Church located in the Toronto suburbs which is receiving the HK diaspora young adults into its faith community. Using in-depth interviews, the researcher explored the experiences of eight HK diaspora young adults (ages 18-35) who recently arrived in Canada, and five church leaders involved in the ministry of welcome and hospitality for the HK diaspora young adults.

This study focused on the feelings, emotions, and experiences of the HK diaspora as they experienced the trauma of the political unrest, navigated the complex transition from HK to Canada, and their changing concept of “community” as they were welcomed and engaged with the church. Insights and challenges are explored to better equip and support local and national churches to care for the increasing numbers of HK diaspora young adults coming to Canada.

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## Contents

Background and Research Topic .....	3
Literature Review .....	4
Impact of Recent Political Change on HK Young Adults and Church .....	4
Immigration Adjustments for the HKDYA .....	6
Churches Engagement with the HK Diaspora .....	7
Church as Community of God’s People that Exercises Hospitality.....	8
Methodology .....	9
Approach .....	9
Context.....	11
Participants.....	11
Ethics.....	12
Data Analysis .....	13
Findings .....	15
Hong Kong Diasporic Young Adults .....	15
Community in Hong Kong .....	15
Impact of the 2019 Political Changes .....	17
Challenges in Setting in Canada .....	23
Community in the Chinese Canadian Church.....	23
Suggestions Building a Caring Community .....	26
Ministry Leaders’ Perspectives .....	28
Main Needs of Hong Kong Diaspora Young Adults .....	28
Summary of Experiences and Needs .....	29
New Changes .....	34
Definition of “Community” .....	36
Church Leadership Support .....	37
Discussion .....	40
Factors Contributing to Emigration .....	40
Freedom .....	40
Family .....	40
Faith .....	41
Mental Health .....	42
Emigration .....	42
Reimagining Community in Canada.....	43
Helping with Settlement .....	43
Mental/Emotional Support.....	44

Welcome .....	45
Church as a Hospitable Community .....	46
Expressions of Hospitality .....	47
Nuancing Pohl’s Theology of Hospitality for the Chinese Church .....	49
Needs of Ministry Leaders .....	53
Support.....	53
Encouragement .....	53
Combatting “Burnout” .....	54
Reimagining “Programs” .....	55
Hospitality Extended.....	56
Church Wide Involvement.....	57
Church Partnerships.....	57
Conclusion .....	59
References.....	61
Appendix A. Interview Questions.....	64

## **Background and Research Topic**

With the 2019 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong (HK), many people from Hong Kong (also referred as Hong Kongers) migrated to various places because of the political situation, with the hope of living in other countries for their own safety. From June 1, 2021, to August 31, 2026, the Canadian government provided two pathways for students and workers from HK to apply for permanent resident status in Canada (Immigration, 2021). This public policy enables people from HK to apply more easily compared to previous immigration policies. According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), with this new policy, there has been an increase of new permanent residents and study permits given to Hong Kongers (Singer, 2022). Many came to Toronto, and a significant portion of them are young adults (henceforth referred to as Hong Kong Diaspora Young Adults [HKDYA] or “young adult/s”).

These HKDYA carry unique stories and experiences. Some left with their families hoping to start a new chapter in Canada; others came alone leaving their family behind. I was interested to see how the political unrest may have impacted the young adults’ sense of personal well-being, feelings of community, faith, and what pushed them to emigrate. Some joined a church in this new environment while others decided that they had enough of faith. I focused on the former, inquiring into how their faith and sense of community may have changed as they joined a Canadian church.

I was interested in knowing their stories and their experiences in migrating from HK to Canada, and how this may have impacted their concept of community. What does “community” mean to these young adults in HK? Why did they decide to leave? What questions did they consider? What caused them to make their final decision? What does it mean for the HKDYA to reimagine community in Canada, and specifically in their new church?

Many churches in Toronto and in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), especially from the Chinese communities, welcomed and received these new HK immigrants. My research also explored one of these churches in the Chinese community that welcomed and received the HKDYA. How did church members welcome and care for them? What were pastors' and leaders' visions concerning outreach, integration, and assimilation into their community? How did the HKDYA respond to these various initiatives? This study will assist and challenge churches in the GTA to understand more about HKDYA and be better equipped to offer hospitality, create spaces for community, and provide support.

In summary, my research sought to understand the impact of the 2019 pro-democracy protests on the HKDYA in HK, the factors leading to their estrangement and emigration to Canada, and their experiences of resettlement and adjustment to a new country and church. I also sought to understand what one church did to support them in their complex process of resettlement.

## **Literature Review**

### **Impact of Recent Political Change on HK Young Adults and Church**

Karen Cheung (2022) expresses in her memoir of HK: "It is not Hong Kong that has died, but the imagination of the place we were promised in 1997" (p. 21). This place that the HK people were promised in 1997 has changed throughout the years. The 2019 HK Protest, also known as Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, has further accelerated this change and impacted many lives, especially those of the HK young adults. Chi Kin Kwan's (2023) study on HK young adults' protests reveals that their involvement impacted their mental health negatively to an extent that some exhibited signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (p.6). This political change left people in fear, including the fear for "political persecution" and unfair trials



because of the Amendment (Louie, 2020, p.3). This also caused family divisions as family members may have opposing opinions about the protest (Kwan, 2023, p.6).

This protest also impacted how people interacted relationally with each other beyond the family. Susanne Choi (2020), a professor at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, shared about her experiences during the time of the protest. She wrote: “By late August, people who stopped to observe the protests were becoming increasingly wary of talking to the person next to them. They have become even more vigilant if they were being filmed and photographed” (p. 281). This affected the HK youth (ages 18-24) and their “belongingness” to Hong Kong and China; however, this “belongingness” differs amongst social constructs (Jang et al., 2022, p. 1311). The protest also impacted the peoples’ lives physically as protests were not designated only in one specific area. People would gather in “noncontroversial spaces” that were accessible to the public (Choi, 2020, p. 280).

The 2019 protest was not only a political movement. In HK, people posted messages in a prominent area known as the “Lennon Wall” (Li & Liu, 2021, p. 69). Based on analysis of some of the messages, the 2019 HK movement can be described as: “A movement seeking democracy and freedom to re-assert Hong Kong identity” (Li & Liu, 2021, p. 69). Huen Wai Yan (2022), a graduate student from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, stated: “They see themselves as politically persecuted and as victims of the Movement, which has deepened their identity as Hong Kongers” (p. 63). As a result, many left HK: “While the movement led to the arrest of more than 10,000 people, over a hundred protesters sought asylum in various countries, such as Taiwan, Canada, Britain, and Germany” (Yan, 2022, p. 63).

This protest impacted many faith communities and the church in HK. Richard Wu (2020), a Master of Theology student at Regent College, noted: “And they reveal the need – and

opportunity – for the church to reclaim its identity as an ecclesial body that dares to wade in the waters of political discernment” (p. 31). Kin Yip Louie (2020), a professor at The China Graduate School of Theology, describes how there were churches and Christian organizations who advocated against the government through social media (p. 208). There were also Christians who organized prayer and worship services and pastoral care (Louie, 2020, p. 208). However, there were also disputes among HK Christians regarding the “church involvement in political issues” because some Christians see the Bible advocating submission to the governing authorities in Rm. 13:1-5 (Louie, 2020, p. 210). With these tensions, it affected how Christians identify with being a “Christian and a law-abiding citizen in Hong Kong” (McGill et al., 2020, p. 358).

### **Immigration Adjustments for the HKDYA**

The United Kingdom (UK) was one of the countries that welcomed the people of HK who sought immigration. The UK government created a path for the HK diaspora known as the British National (Overseas) – BN(O), providing them an opportunity to live in the UK (Liang, 2022, p.4). Some highlighted the challenges of adjusting to a new country. In the New York Times, one of the HK diaspora shared about his struggles to find a job because his “English was too poor” and he also found it difficult to make friends (Kwai, 2022, para. 2); another shared about the rising house prices in the UK (Kwai, 2022, para. 18). There are also differences of opinions regarding political views about the situation in HK causing the Chinese pro-Beijing supporters to harangue Hong Kongers online (Kwai, 2022, para. 22).

Mark Liang (2022), a medical student at UC Irvine, highlights: “Studies indicate that around a quarter of recent HK immigrants to the UK exhibit clinically significant symptoms of PTSD” (p. 6). There could be different reasons contributing to their trauma and one was the impact from the 2019 protest (Loi & Fat, 2022, para. 1). Some of these HK diasporas were

hesitant to seek professional help about their mental health issues, but they would share with their family members (Loi & Fat, 2022, para. 7).

The Canadian government provided two pathways for students and workers from HK to apply for permanent resident status in Canada from June 1, 2021 to August 31, 2026 (Immigration, 2021). However, there are some barriers for the HKDYA who have already arrived and started to work in Canada. For those who graduated before 2016, they may not meet the requirement of Canada's HK Pathway because they do not qualify for the "5-year graduation criteria" (Arce, 2022, para. 2). Without certainly they would be granted permanent status, this became a concern for the HKDYA (Kupfer, 2022, para. 6).

### **Churches Engagement with the HK Diaspora**

As the HK diaspora emigrate to other countries, churches around the world are learning to engage with them. Mcdade reported that churches were coming up with different ways to welcome the HK diaspora (Mcdade, 2021, paras. 3-5). This included partnerships between local congregations and evangelical groups to receive the HK diaspora (Mcdade, 2021, para. 8). Churches in the UK increased in size because of the HK diaspora and they were learning how to care for these HKDYA in Chinese churches that consisted of Mandarin, Cantonese and English services. Some had different perspectives about the political situation than the HK diaspora (Ong, 2022, para. 58). Chu indicates "What exacerbates these tensions is that talking about political matters remains taboo in many Chinese churches. But Chu hopes that pastors can address the wellbeing of their new Hong Kong congregants" (Quoted in Ong, 2022, para. 60).

In Canada, some churches and Christian organizations partnered together to welcome the HK diaspora. CANHK, an initiative to help the HKDYA in Canada, welcomed the HK diaspora by providing information and connecting them to local churches (CANHK | Welcome to Canada,

2023, para. 1). Other Chinese churches, such as the Mississauga Chinese United Church, offered support (social and spiritual) in settling in Canada (*Canada – Hong Kong United Heart to Heart Project 加港心聯心 – MCUC*, 2023, para. 1). There is little literature on how the estrangement due to the pro-democracy protest of 2019 impacted the HKDYA's sense of community, experiences related to resettlement in Canada, their hopes and dreams in their new adopted country, and the impact of the help provided by the Canadian churches during this transition.

### **Church as Community of God's People that Exercises Hospitality**

As the HKDYA settle into faith communities, what are the implications for the Church as a community of God's people that exercises hospitality? Anthony B. Robinson (2006) states: "Church is not the building nor is it the leader. It is people gathered into community in response to God's call in Jesus Christ" (p. 111). To Robinson (2006), the understanding of the Church is shaped through the metaphors of "people of God, body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit" (p. 113). Allison Morgan (2015) explains, "A church is a community of disciples, a gathering of people who have been called individually and collectively into relationship with God" (p. 115). The call for the community of disciples is to live out the purpose of proclaiming the gospel, to "train and send disciples out into the world" and invite others to be a part of God's kingdom (Morgan, 2015, pp. 159-162). This requires practicing hospitality. Christine Pohl (1999) highlights: "Because hospitality is basic to who we are as followers of Jesus, every aspect of our lives can be touched by its practice" (p. 118).

Pohl (2012) further proposes: "Hospitality is at the heart of Christian life, drawing from God's grace and reflecting God's graciousness. In hospitality, we respond to the welcome that God has offered and replicate that welcome in the world" (p. 89). There are many contexts for communities to practice hospitality. One is in small groups. Morgan (2015) mentions how small

groups can be a place where people can support each other and grow together (p. 245). This can be a place where a community of disciples would care for each other, grow spiritually, with the “application of (one’s) learning experience” in and outside the small group (Bennett, 2016, pp. 31-32). Inviting people into homes would be another example of showing hospitality (Pohl, 2012, p. 92). Although this could be inconvenient and the house could be a mess, Pohl (2012) emphasizes that “...hospitality is an invitation to mutual truthfulness” (p. 92). Pohl (2012) also shares about her experiences of eating breakfast together and taking communion as part of the worship service (p. 96). In addition to hosting physical spaces, Pohl (2012) suggests “sharing our gifts” which include giving people time and attention (p. 94). Pohl (2012) highlights the importance of sharing gifts in a community and notes: “Human beings need a place in which they and their contributions are valued, and a hospitable community finds ways to value the gifts people bring” (p. 94).

## **Methodology**

### **Approach**

My research was conducted through the lens of a “developmental puzzle.” Mary Moschella (2008) highlights Jennifer Mason’s “four types of intellectual puzzles for qualitative researchers (p. 61). By choosing the “developmental puzzle,” I sought to ask the question, “How did this come to be?” (Moschella, 2008, 59). My research was a study of how the HKDYA understood “community” before coming to Canada, the impact of the 2019 pro-democracy protests on the HKDYA in HK, their thought processes involved in deciding to emigrate, experiences in adapting to a new environment, and their experience in adjusting to a new faith community in Canada.

I also looked at one Chinese congregation, as a case study of a Chinese church which welcomed and helped in the transition of the HKDYA. Patton (2015) notes that conducting case studies validates the “meaning-making process” because it provides “depth, detail and individual meaning” (p. 23). The use of single case studies is not for generalization to larger populations, but is a valid method to gain an in-depth understanding into a phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2009; Starman, 2013). Campbell-Reid notes that a case study can provide a powerful form of knowing, rooted in context and interpretation (2016, 54). Thomas (2011) highlights that a case was not selected based upon a representative sample, but rather because it was interesting, unusual, and striking (p. 514). For Yin, a case study can be helpful when we are eager to answer the questions of “how” and “why,” when we cannot influence the behavior of those involved in a study, and when we want to cover contextual conditions that may be relevant to the phenomenon under study (Yin in Baxter & Jack 2008, p. 545.)

I used in-depth interviews as the main qualitative research tool. A combination of experience questions, opinion and value questions, and feeling questions were asked (Patton, 2015, p.701; see Appendix A). This was a more “standardized open-ended interview” as participants were asked open-ended questions in the same order. Patton (2015) outlines the merits in having this interview instrumentation as it allows data to be compared between participants and reduce interviewer bias upon several interviews (p. 691).

Patton (2015) describes how qualitative inquiry can be a “powerful source of grounded theory” as it is generated from field work such as interviews (p. 18). Yin (2009) highlights the strength in conducting interviews as it allows the research to be directly focused on the topic, “suggest explanations” and to hear personal views of insiders connected to the phenomenon (p. 144-146). This helps with understanding each person’s perspective as we hear their personal

narratives. Patton (2015) notes: “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind to gather their stories” (p. 675).

### **Context**

I selected one of the larger church congregations located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This is a suburban church that served various communities around the area. This church originated as an Asian immigrant church as it predominately served Southeast and East Asian ethnic communities from HK, mainland China, Southeast Asia, and its next generation. This church and the Cantonese speaking fellowship for young adults received many HK diaspora young adults in the past year, and continues to do so.

David McCurdy, James Spradley and Dianna Shandy (2005) share about the importance of locating cultural informants and one option is to find an informant through a “go-between” (p. 23). I introduced myself to one of the Cantonese pastors at this church and told him about my research. He introduced me to one of the Cantonese fellowships to ask for volunteers who met the research criteria and who were willing to participate in the study. This community targets post-secondary graduates up to mid-30s and has been receiving the HKDYA since September 2021. They originally had around 40 members, but from September 2021 it has grown to around 80 members because of the increase in HKDYA. This fellowship meets at the church building every Friday evening.

### **Participants**

I used the “criterion-based case selection” to select participants for the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015, p. 436). Patton (2015) outlines the merits of such a purposeful sampling of “information-rich cases” (pp. 242-243). I interviewed eight KDYA (five females and three

males) who met the following criteria: (1) ages 18-35; (2) self-proclaimed Christians; (3) recently arrived in Canada (within three months to two years) from HK and are part of Canada's HK Pathway for Permanent Residency; and (4) have attended this church for at least three months. Two of the HKDYA are siblings and the two other HKDYA are currently in a dating relationship. I interviewed the siblings separately and interviewed the dating couple together.

I also interviewed a total of five ministry leaders from the church who supported the HK diaspora community. I interviewed the pastor who was overseeing this fellowship and one couple who worked with the fellowship committee to plan and implement the program and provide support for the fellowship. I also interviewed one couple who were responsible for welcoming and following up with the HKDYA in the fellowship. These leaders have attended this church for at least seven years. The interviews with each participant were around 45 minutes each, conducted in English and recorded on Zoom.

### **Ethics**

This research was reviewed by the Research Ethics Board (REB) of Tyndale University and upon their approval on February 7, 2023, the research was conducted. This ensured that ethical standards were met to protect the rights of the participants. As Moschella (2008) states, "We need to bring reverence to research relationships. Reverence is profound respect and regard for the dignity of the persons and communities who allow us to see so much of themselves" (p. 87). Therefore, participants needed to be aware of the purpose of my research and in particular the procedure, the risks, benefits, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Prior to the interviews, all participants reviewed and signed a consent form which was approved by the REB of Tyndale University. Participants were aware that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. They would be allowed to refrain



from answering questions with which they were not comfortable, and could request to stop the interview at any time without detriment to our relationship or the church. If participants were triggered by sad emotions and/or memories during the interview, the interview would be stopped, and they would be directed to counseling resources at Tyndale University.

I had no prior connection with the participants other than the pastor who introduced me to them. As part of the consent form, I reassured them that I would be using pseudonyms in my report so they would not be identified. Each participant signed the consent form before they were interviewed.

I am aware that I may carry certain perspectives, biases, and presuppositions as I am a second generation Chinese Canadian. I know that I have been influenced by my Chinese roots. I grew up in a multiethnic society while being raised by HK parents, and attended a predominately Cantonese and Mandarin speaking church. I learned to love this part of my identity even though I only travelled to HK once. Therefore, I see my role more as an “outsider” and hope to learn and understand more about the HKDYA from their “insider” perspective. I adopted Ted Ward’s “Six ethnographic sequences” throughout this research. The first included “clearing the mind” so that I can “see and hear things as they really are” (Siew, 2022). I was also seeking to be self-reflexive and kept a journal throughout the data collection process, so as not project to project myself or any biases as I engaged with the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

I utilized Sonix (<https://sonix.ai/>), an automated online transcription platform, to transcribe and code the interviews and sought to find common patterns and themes. I initially categorized the data within each interview question using Jennifer Mason’s technique of grouping data in “slices and bags” (Moschella, 2008, p. 170). This included using Patton’s

(2015) “convergence and divergence” when coding and classifying the data (p. 873). This ensured “meaningfulness” and “accuracy” when categorizing the data and to build from existing themes as well as see how new themes emerged (Patton, 2015, p. 875). I also included Kalpokaite & Radivojevic’s (2019) third step of “elaborative coding” to connect the analyzed data to the related themes from the literature review (p. 52). I repeated these cycles to see how the categories I came up with also aligned with my original research and interview questions (Yin, 2009, p. 195). During this process, data saturation emerged in some areas, which helped to verify the patterns and themes (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019, p.46). I then gathered quotes for these themes and placed it into larger categories.

By using the standardized open-ended interview instrumentation, Patton (2015) noted the limitations in flexibility in relating to the participants and the “naturalness and relevance of questions and answers” (p. 691). Yin (2009) discussed some of the weaknesses in interviews as there could be biases from the questions and responses, inaccuracies, and reflexivity (p. 144).

There were only 8 HK diaspora young adults who fulfilled all the noted criteria to be selected. Although interviewing more participants from this church could strengthen the findings, conclusions, and suggestions, data saturation was seen in some areas. In addition, I sought triangulation of data between individual young adults, as well as between the young adults and church ministry participants.

There are limitations in conducting practical theological research through case studies. Campbell-Reid (2016) noted that some dangers include: “personal bias, overgeneralizing, lack of attention to power dynamics, including a research’s own role in the situation” (p. 58). However, through her reinterpretation on the limitations in the perspective of Flyvbjerg’s “five misunderstandings of ‘case-study research,’” Campbell-Reid reaffirmed how case studies can

“embody new knowledge and practical wisdom” (p. 48). Her suggestions are as follows: (1) “fundamental paradox in the social and political sciences” (2) case studies cannot be generalized (3) case studies are based on assumptions and hypotheses; (4) “preconceived notions” in case studies; and (5) making “too big of a claim” based on one case study (pp. 48-53).

## **Findings**

### **Hong Kong Diasporic Young Adults**

#### *Community in Hong Kong*

With regards to their perception of “community” in HK, the common words and phrases included “sharing life with the people that they love”. These people could be their friends, family, and colleagues where they “endured hardships together”, talked often and spent time together. Having similar values and memorable moments helped with having a sense of belonging. One HKDYA mentioned: “It’s just like a group of people that are there for you, to support you, and support each other” (HKDYA F). She cited her strong relationship with her colleagues, which helped her sustain a very busy and demanding work schedule. She said, “We are like friends or half colleagues and half friends...sometimes, even if it is a very hard time or tiring, it is quite fun to work with them” (HKDYA A). For them, part of “community” was sharing life during challenging times.

Being part of a faith community at a young age and staying connected through many years, allowed people to develop a sense of belonging and helped with practicing their faith. Most of the HKDYA attended weekly worship services, small groups and fellowship. Some even served in the fellowship to help with audio-visual and created PowerPoint presentations. One HKDYA mentioned how it was part of their culture to work late, but she was still motivated to attend the Bible studies afterwards. She said:

Our friendship caused us to “crawl back” to church at 9:00 pm after work. Like it is not easy, like everyone is grabbing McDonald's, KFC, and we just keep talking as friends and then studied the Bible till around 11:00 pm and then go back home at midnight. (HKDYA A)

For some of these HKDYA, a faith community was one that encouraged one another in studying God's Word and in pursuing faith in a demanding work schedule. One HKDYA emphasized how having the openness to share helped her feel that she was part of the community. One person said: “In Hong Kong, I attended a church and fellowship... it's a community for me. I'm open to share what I feel... they were focused on asking me to share about my life or my religious thoughts or share everything” (HKDYA E).

Everyone has their own unique faith journey. One person stopped attending church when he was a child in HK, but he still remembered that this was his first community experience and the impact it had on his faith journey. Although he left his HK church community in his early years, he acknowledged: “I would say that this was a seed that was planted in my heart, so that when I grew up, I came to Toronto and I joined the church again” (HKDYA H).

Community was not limited to personal relationships, but extended to one's country. One person said: “I think for a race or for a country or for a union to be, the sense of belonging is very important. And also in a community, I think people need to have some memorable events” (HKDYA B). He shared about his experience as an international student in Australia during the COVID lockdown period. The government set a target and a specific number of vaccinations for the citizens. If the citizens met a certain vaccination rate collectively, they would be allowed to travel a further distance. Having to meet a collective goal in society or in a small community can help people feel this sense of belonging and teamwork because they each have a role in this community.

### *Impact of the 2019 Political Changes*

**Views on Freedom.** Each HKDYA's understanding of freedom impacted their perspective on how the political changes affected their freedom. For some, it changed their definition of freedom. One person said:

I think that freedom is... what everyone deserves and what everyone will have. When you're born in this world, you have it. But now I understand that it is not like this – we were lucky to understand what was freedom this way. When I was a kid, I had experienced some certain level of freedom. But now I understand that it is not necessary that you have that kind of freedom. (HKDYA A)

Some of them described different levels of freedom. One person explained: “Not everywhere has freedom. It is about the level of freedom you can have. HK had more freedom until three to four years ago. There is less freedom now” (HKDYA D). Another shared a similar perspective and expressed how much it affected her. She said:

In the past, I think we had more freedom in every aspect. Everyone knew that kind of freedom, but the extent of that freedom narrowed a lot to a point that I cannot live there anymore. It really affected my life, both emotionally and physically. (HKDYA F)

One HKDYA shared how he felt that they had a “high degree of freedom” in HK before the political changes. He mentioned: “We can talk whatever we like and we can do whatever we like. But after the political change, I just feel like freedom is something that we need to fight for because it is not free” (HKDYA H). Another person shared a similar sentiment: “I just don't like the way they forced you to not speak a word about something that they don't want you to talk about. It makes me feel like you should have freedom of speech” (HKDYA E). One young adult talked about serious consequences if one crossed the line:

If you say or do something wrong, especially young people, you can be arrested. You can be put in jail because of that. And even the press cannot tell the truth. If you say it, you will be in trouble as well.” (HKDYA G)

One person was almost resigned with their loss of freedom.

So, if you live there, you need to accept this. You can't fight. We can't fight the reality. We can't fight the government. They always have more power than you...if you want to enjoy more freedom, the only way is to move to another place. If you accept the government, don't do what they don't want you to do or do what they want you to do. (HKDYA D)

One young adult mentioned about how the political changes affected her trust with people and her concern for her speech. It made her suspicious of others and hesitant to share her concerns, especially political or public concerns. She said: "It affects the trust between people. When I say something to my friends, I will think if my friends will report me on this. I will also think about what do my friends think of my speech or my thoughts" (HKDYA C).

This limit on freedom goes beyond the borders of HK. One person expressed that even though he is currently in Canada, he is afraid for his family's safety in HK. He said: "I won't speak too much about my political thoughts because I know that my parents are still in HK, and I don't want them to have any safety issues" (HKDYA B). He planned to visit HK, but he is afraid that what he currently says could be used as a threat from the government to his family members. He said, "I don't want any political arguments that the Chinese government isn't happy about and then use my family to threaten me" (HKDYA B).

**Views on Immigration.** Some of these HKDYA never thought of leaving HK before the political changes, but have changed their minds. One person thought of staying throughout the beginning of the political changes. She said: "It seems that there was no need to leave at that time, but time passed, and I think there was less hope than I thought" (HKDYA C). Another shared similar thoughts. He expressed how he did not have a future in HK and it felt hopeless, so he wanted to try to live in other places (HKDYA H).

Some were used to seeing friends and relatives emigrate to different places in the world, so they were optimistic about living in a new place to explore and to become more independent.

One young adult said: “I would like to have a chance to try to go to a new place that I've never been and to have something like a life difference there” (HKDYA E).

Some young adults expressed how countries like Canada and the UK announced special immigration pathways which made them think more about moving to another country. One young adult said:

Before 2019, I think I never thought about moving to another country, but then a lot of things happened and especially in Canada, they rolled out a special pathway for Hong Kong people... the immigration policy. I think it's really attractive for me and also a lot of my friends planned to or already moved to other countries in the UK, USA or Canada. That made me reflect... maybe I should really leave as well. (HKDYA F)

Almost all of the young adults shared that with the change in government policy that there was less of a future and hope. Some wanted a new beginning, following friends who left. People who decided to come to Toronto, Canada saw this as one of the fastest pathways to get a permanent residence identity compared to other countries.

**Views on Family.** Most of the HKDYA expressed how the political changes impacted their relationship with their family members, particularly with their parents who did not share their perspectives. Some recalled deep conflicts between them and their parents. One person said:

I had a different point of view on the political aspect with my family. At that time, I got into a really serious fight with my family, especially with my parents... we didn't talk to each other... the relationship between my family was very bad. (HKDYA C)

Another echoed this sad experience: “There was quite a big impact on the family as well because when the protest started, my parents and I had different political values. We fought a lot... because our emotions came out easily when we had different values” (HKDYA H).

However, this person mentioned that one year after the political situation, he wanted to forgive his parents and tried to understand their perspective. He said, “And after I think about that, I just

think that maybe I should forgive them because I guess family is the most valuable thing in this world. I shouldn't let political views affect our relationships” (HKDYA H).

Some said they avoided talking about this topic with their family members to preserve peace. Because of this, it did not affect their relationship as much, but she said:

We have a different point of view between my parents and my brother and me. They may think that the kids are doing stuff that is inappropriate. And we would say that there are reasons behind it, but we actually don't fight about it. We will avoid talking about this kind of topic at home. (HKDYA G)

Another young adult shared: “I understand their stance, but I just won't try to persuade them. We just never talk about it. I think they also know what my stance is, but we just don't want to touch on the differences between us” (HKDYA F). This person acknowledged that she did not have a close relationship with her parents, and she did not want it to deteriorate. “It also worsened our relationship for a bit because knowing how they felt about this whole situation was against my point of view just makes me feel a bit disappointed in them” (HKDYA F).

All the young adults commented that their family members supported them to immigrate whether or not they had the same point of view regarding the political changes. Moreover, not all had tensions with their family members about the political changes. One person mentioned how thankful she was because her family was quite supportive of her views.

**Views on Quality of Life.** A few HKDYA mentioned the overall atmosphere and mood of the environment. One person commented: “The atmosphere is not just the physical thing, but I can feel stress, and I can feel like I'm not happy to live, to work and I just want to stay at home after work. And even though I hang out with friends, I'm not really that happy because everyone is not happy at all” (HKDYA C). Another left HK to follow his girlfriend. He thought he could continue his life in HK despite the circumstances he faced. However, after he left, he noticed the difference in the atmosphere after arriving in Canada. He said: “But I think after I came here, I



think I can feel that the atmosphere is greatly different than in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, I think it's a feeling that it is difficult to breathe" (HKDYA D). Another person was concerned for her safety and commented about the atmosphere in HK:

I would say it affected my life in 2019 when it first started. I felt a little bit unsafe when I was on the street, late at night, which I never felt like that before. I think it's just the feeling, like nothing much really changed, but just the vibes in Hong Kong or the topics that I talk with my friends about were more related to those political things. (HKDYA G)

One young adult lamented how these political changes affected her mental health. She said:

I think one major aspect that affected me is my mental health. When I was still in Hong Kong, I browsed social media, Instagram or Facebook everyday and all I can see is all the news related to all those political things. It really affected me mentally because I was really stressed, anxious, scared, sad and heartbroken - like all those negative emotions. (HKDYA F)

Values systems were also a factor in leaving HK. One person felt a strong sense of belonging to China before the protest. However, after the 2019 protests, he changed his mind because he felt that he could not continue to live out his values in HK. He noted:

I think the values of the Hong Kong people is good, but we can't continue because of the dictatorship, the police force, and the security law. I can't continue to live my values. I can't continue in my culture because I imagine maybe the communist party can continue a Hong Kong style or Hong Kong culture. But I can't, I can't see that hope. (HKDYA B)

Another wanted to move because of her current values on family and life. She wanted to have a close relationship with her future children, but she was afraid that staying in HK would limit this. She said: "I don't have my freedom to teach what I believe is freedom or what is human rights to my kids...I'm afraid that will affect my relationship with my family or my kids" (HKDYA A).

**Views on Faith Community.** Some HKDYA shared how their faith community impacted their decision to leave HK. Although these young adults were part of different

communities, they expressed how supportive their faith communities were with regard to their decision.

One person saw the fact that most of the churches in HK would not “dare” to talk about the political situation. She said:

Some of the young people in church would feel disappointed when the church doesn't speak for the young people. Some of the church members may leave the church or they just don't go to church because of the disappointment. They may stop their church life from that time. (HKDYA C)

She shared the reasons why churches avoid speaking about these matters in public. Her pastor explained to her: “If our church or pastor says something in public, there is no way to get everyone satisfied. So, they avoid to speak because no matter what they say, there would be some people who will agree or disagree” (HKDYA C).

Some agreed that the political changes impacted their faith. One person vocalized:

It definitely affected my faith negatively, especially when I was in Hong Kong. I think it's normal for us to question, why? Why are things like this happening to us? To young people in Hong Kong, especially there's so many people who were arrested, even disappeared or maybe got beaten up by police? There are so many different cases. It really made me question what is the role of God in all this and with all the heartbreaking incidents? (HKDYA F).

However, one person mentioned that in her community, some believed they needed to stay in their community. Others believed that they could leave any time so they would like to enjoy a few more years in HK. People were respectful of each other's opinions regardless about their own views and considerations on whether to stay or leave.

In summary, the recent political changes impacted the HKDYA views on freedom, immigration, family relationships, quality of life, and faith community.

### *Challenges Settling in Canada*

The top three challenges for the HKDYA included: finding a place to live and the unaffordable price of rent, transportation (not everyone has a license or a car) and the cold Canadian weather. For those who were here a little longer and are in the process of applying for their permanent residence, their main challenges included: discerning their job or career path, making future plans, and becoming more financially stable.

### *Community in the Chinese Canadian Church*

**Helping with Settlement.** All the HKDYA shared that the Chinese Canadian church they attend reflects their understanding of Christian community. When two of the young adults arrived in Toronto earlier this year, they shared how the pastor at this church helped them settle in their apartment. This pastor drove them to IKEA to buy furniture and helped them move into the apartment.

Another person mentioned how a couple in their fellowship lived close to them and helped them with car maintenance. The people in this community would drive them around and show them different neighborhoods. One person said: “This is the community that I want, and I think...it really helped me no matter materialistically or the caring support. And I think this can provide a sense of belonging for me” (HKDYA C).

**Language/Ethnicity.** Another factor in their sense of belonging in this new faith community included sharing the same language, ethnicity, and culture. One person mentioned how speaking the same language was important because of mutual understanding. He knew HK people who came to this church because they knew it was a good place for them to settle down in Toronto even though they were non-Christians; this church speaks the same language and church members provide support.

This person also saw intergenerational relationships in this community. He noticed many people from different generations from HK attending this church. He said: “They understand why we came to Canada. I think is a good channel for us to share our experience with each other” (HKDYA B). He would like to share his experiences with the older generation on why he left HK and also receive support from the older generation in helping him settle in Canada. One person shared a similar sentiment. She said: “...that's great because the sense of community is even stronger because we all speak the same language and have a similar background” (HKDYA F).

**Welcoming/Hospitality.** The welcoming atmosphere contributed to the HKDYAs’ sense of belonging. One person mentioned how the people were nice and helpful and made him feel comfortable. Another said: “They treated us very good unconditionally...I think they can provide lots of support and lots of love from God” (HKDYA C).

In addition to the physical support, the church members invited them to their homes and ate with them. One person said:

They would organize activities such as having dinners and going ice skating. They would invite me. They also added me in the WhatsApp group. They were very eager to talk to me and asked me about my life, my difficulties and offered help. (HKDYA F)

One young adult boasted how the church members were always willing to offer help, drive her to church and share information with her. Another felt comfortable to express himself at this church. He said: “We are on the same channel. I feel so comfortable to express myself at this church. Most importantly, because in a community, I think we would like to help each other although we are not family relatives, but because we belong to the same community” (HKDYA H).

**Mental / Emotional Support.** One person said that this church helped her settle mentally. She added: “I have quite often that feeling of being a little bit lonely because family is good, but I still need friends in Canada. This church gave me the chance to meet people around my age” (HKDYA G). She was thankful to be able to meet people who are sharing more or less the same experiences as her in Canada. Another gratefully said this church helped him settle emotionally. He said:

I met some friends here, so I feel less lonely here because I just came here alone. That’s how this church helped me and supported me to be more emotionally stable...I can share my difficulties and my thoughts to other people at the church and they can talk me through it. (HKDYA H)

**Struggles in Settling.** Some found it difficult to settle into this community in the beginning although all the young adults agreed that this church reflected their understanding of community. One person felt there was less opportunity to share her thoughts and about her life at this church because there were more people at this church compared to her church in HK. She said: “At this church, it's like you have a big group and there's many people. We are separated into smaller groups, but there's still many people there. I feel like there's less opportunity for me to share about my life” (HKDYA E).

Another found the adjustment difficult in the beginning. She said: “It was actually quite hard at the beginning because there were too many people. They seem like they don’t really know each other well. I heard they didn't start the in-person fellowship for a long time because of the pandemic” (HKDYA G). It was difficult for her to get to know people within such a large community when the group was not familiar with each other.

In summary, four factors helped the HKDYA feel a sense of belonging and community in their current Chinese Canadian church: (1) supporting their settlement; (2) having the same

language/ethnicity; (3) being welcoming/hospitable; and (4) providing mental/emotional support. Some young adults struggled to settle in the beginning.

### ***Suggestions for Building a Caring Community***

**Caring Atmosphere.** HKDYA provided some suggestions that would help them feel more welcomed in this community. One person said: “You always feel that there are some people staying near you and you don't need to give a lot of energy to keep approaching new people and to build up new connections for yourself” (HKDYA A). This helps one to feel included and not alone.

One young adult said she would feel welcomed if people were proactive to talk to her and ask her questions. She said: “It's a little bit weird for me to express myself without being asked. I would prefer people in a group that is more proactive to show that they love to know more about me” (HKDYA G). She also shared that having dinner or gathering at a home can help her get to know people well.

One person mentioned that church leaders could provide connections in the community especially because they know more people. He said:

The leaders are like a bridge between me and other members in this community because I'm kind of an introverted person, so I'm afraid to just open up in a conversation. A leader can help me to be more connected to other members as a person to be introduced to other people. (HKDYA H)

Another person emphasized that it was important for the church leaders and members to understand the differences between existing members and HKDYA in their community. He said:

The leader needs to know how to let the small group or original members open their minds to welcome the HKDYA. The leader can always take care of the HKDYA, but they need to know how to let the HKDYA enjoy the group life in a small group or help them to find friends in the group. (HKDYA B)

**Serving.** Some HKDYA shared that serving together can help make them feel more

welcomed. One person said:

Invite me to join some volunteer activity which can make me belong to this community. I'm not the only person that can receive help. I also can use my knowledge, power or effort to build up this community or the people that need help. (HKDYA B)

Another shared similar thoughts. She suggested that church members ask her about her opinions, provide opportunities to serve, or even welcome HKDYA at church. She said: "When I'm more involved in it, I feel like I will be more connected in the community because I can feel like I'm a member in it" (HKDYA E).

**Transportation.** One person spoke about the importance of carpooling because not everyone has a vehicle. She said, "If the church can provide carpooling to go to church, it will increase the motivation for us to go to church regularly and to join a fellowship, and other activities" (HKDYA C). Moreover, church is quite far away for many of the HKDYA: "Like most of us don't have cars and most of us have to live near a school or near the city core where it is easier to find job opportunities, so it is not easy to travel back to church" (HKDYA A).

**Deep Conversations.** One young adult mentioned about how the feeling of being known would help him feel more welcomed. He said:

Others may like to know more about my history or know more about why I came to a new place or a new country. That makes me feel that they do not only want to help me and enjoy their group events, but they truly want to know my own self, my history and my personality. (HKDYA B)

Another person shared about her feelings when engaging in conversations with the church community about the situation in HK. She suggested that on a fellowship level, it would be good if there was time to share openly. She said that it helped her feel more included and welcomed when the fellowship members have watched the news, vocalized their support for them, and understand their situation more deeply. She was aware that there were some people in

the church who did share her ideas. Yet, by creating space for conversations, it could help HKDYA and existing members develop a bonding relationship. She said:

If the church is really open to this kind of topic and we have many HKDYA in this fellowship in this situation, and there are a lot of existing members of the fellowship who are actually very supportive, understanding or even want to help these HKDYA, why don't we just create such a space...? (HKDYA A)

In summary, the HKDYA suggested 4 factors that would help build a caring community:

(1) caring atmosphere; (2) serving together; (3) provide transportation; and (4) having deeper conversations.

### **Ministry Leaders' Perspectives**

#### ***Main Needs of Hong Kong Diaspora Young Adults***

Since September 2021, this church has been receiving the HKDYA. The ministry leaders summarized the following short term and immediate needs for the HKDYA: job seeking, adapting to culture, speaking English, transportation, rent and getting permanent residency.

Some of the HKDYA were social workers or teachers in HK. However, when they came to Canada, they were unable to pursue the same career because of the difference in licensing requirements, academic qualifications, and qualifying criteria. This ministry leader said: “In some cases, we need to help them to migrate from feeling rejected to feeling frustrated to, I do not want to use the word accept, but to try to cope with the new environment” (Ministry Leader K). He also explained how if some of them would like to pursue a degree, they may need to find a job first to see if they have sufficient financial resources to pursue study again.

Two ministry leaders mentioned that the HKDYA need to build strong networks and connections. One ministry leader mentioned about how the young adults have several social platform support groups like *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*. However, he added: “But things like editing the résumé, finding a better career path, those things, I think they need a bit more



professional or more advice from mature and experienced people. I think they need it at their age” (Ministry Leader L).

HKDYA need to find places to rent and live. However, they face high rental property prices and they are also not the only people looking for dwelling units. One ministry leader shared her observations about the HKDYA’ long-term goals to make Toronto their home. She stated:

I think in the long run, assuming they want to settle in Toronto, I guess it's really trying to make Toronto their home because I understand it's not easy for a lot of them to leave behind their families, their established careers, their friends in Hong Kong, and then start brand new in a new country.” (Ministry Leader I).

She added, “So that they can establish their lives here and continue to grow here financially, and spiritually, as a lot of them are already at an age where they should be establishing a family”

(Ministry Leader I). Another ministry leader highlighted spiritual support as one of their needs:

“Some are serious about finding a church” (Ministry Leader M).

### ***Summary of Experiences and Needs***

**Positive.** The ministry leaders shared about their positive experiences in supporting the HKDYA. One became friends with the young adults and another ministry leader was able to see God’s grace in this ministry. He saw many people join their fellowship and explore Christianity (Ministry Leader L).

**Struggles.** Almost all of the ministry leaders, including those who had positive experiences, echoed that it was an overwhelming experience helping the HKDYA. One ministry leader said: “I initially felt quite overwhelmed, especially during the initial wave where I was actually introduced to new people every week last year” (Ministry Leader I). She was overwhelmed by being introduced to new people on a weekly basis and it took a lot of work to

keep in touch (texting the HKDYA and checking up on them), see to their needs, and help them as a ministry team. Another ministry leader said:

In the first place, it was quite overwhelming because we didn't know what to do. It's a learning journey for us as well. We have never contacted or touched base with so many people every week and not counting the time we are spending on reaching out or caring for these people. ...it's more like we don't know what they need, or we don't even know if they are okay with coming to church because some of them are non-believers. It was also a new trial for us. (Ministry Leader L)

One ministry leader mentioned: "Basically, for the last year and a half, it kind of came like a tsunami. It kind of caught me by surprise at the rate at which they came" (Ministry Leader M). Another ministry leader mentioned:

Well, I think the first key word which came to my mind immediately was overwhelming and overwhelming in terms of the number of fellowship size...before September 2020, we managed to have around 40 members attend our fellowship regularly. Since September 2021 and up to now, we having around 80 or sometimes we exceeded over 80 people who attended our fellowship regularly. And not to mention other HKDYA we are still connecting. (Ministry Leader K)

**Lack of Resources.** The ministry leaders spoke about the limited human resources to support the HKDYA. One ministry leader said: "I guess it is quite time consuming. I feel like we have really limited resources to help. There seems like a never-ending wave of Hong Kong people coming. So, I don't know" (Ministry Leader I).

Another ministry leader shared similar challenges. He said, "There's only three people in our welcoming ministry and it's hard for us to handle like 100 people or even like ten people every week" (Ministry Leader L). He added: "... in the past they may be like handling ten people max in a group, but now it's like every week they're dealing with 20 plus people, and half of them they don't know. Half of them are non-believers" (Ministry Leader L).

One ministry leader acknowledged the struggle to care for the HKDYA. He had a system to keep track of care which involved assigning a person to follow up by calling 5-6 young adults.

He added: “But even follow up with these new people and with these HKDYA, we just initially struggled with even doing that just because the rate at which they were coming in. At least that was the first half of the year or so” (Ministry Leader M).

One Ministry Leader mentioned about the “lack of members to step up to be small group leaders” (Ministry Leader K). There were not enough leaders to break down each cell group into smaller groups.

**Transportation.** Almost all the ministry leaders highlighted the challenge of finding rides for the HKDYA to attend the fellowship gathering because most of them do not live in the surrounding area, but rather in North York, Scarborough and downtown. One ministry leader mentioned: “Getting a ride is a big issue because they don't have cars and bussing to our church is not that easy” (Ministry Leader J). Another ministry leader echoed his thoughts and commented how it “created a big load to the leaders.” He said:

That means whoever has a car needed to offer a ride, not just leaders, but everyone in the fellowship who had a car. We involved them to be volunteer drivers. That can be a very wearisome load because when they leave their office or home, they need to spend half an hour to one hour to drive around, to pick up the HKDYA and then drive them to church. And then after that fellowship gathering, usually most of them went out to have snacks and go to restaurants afterwards. Then, they also needed to drive the HKDYA back to their homes around 11:30 pm or even midnight. And that can be quite physically demanding to them. (Ministry Leader K)

Gas prices can be expensive, and some of the ministry leaders shared that the church does not subsidize the cost of gas to drive the HKDYA around, and they have to pay out of their own pocket.

**Caring and Building Relationships.** Ministry leaders struggled to build connections and maintain relationships. One ministry leader said: “Another struggle really is trying to build that connection because when you meet so many people every week, it's just hard to build a relationship with every single person” (Ministry Leader I).

One ministry leader shared about the difficulty in keeping track of each HKDYA because they have different priorities. He said: “That's why it's like we don't expect them to come to church every week. But we can't keep bugging them, texting them, like every single week asking how they're doing and stuff” (Ministry Leader L). Another ministry leader said: “I guess at the beginning, when the first few came to the fellowship, I called them up and talked to them. But I can't do that anymore when there are 100 people coming” (Ministry Leader J).

Another ministry leader struggled with “offering companionship” to the young adults at the beginning. He said: “We just have a small picture of a young adult's background and sometimes we do not know how to walk with them. Sometimes we do not know what kind of incidents they experienced in Hong Kong” (Ministry Leader K). He did not know how to really care for their emotional needs.

**HKDYA and Existing Members.** One ministry leader mentioned about the gap relating to the type of program during the fellowship (Ministry Leader K). There are currently around 20% non-believers in the fellowship, along with HKDYA who have not attended church during the two years of the social movements. With the latter group, the ministry leader said that they need to help them “pick up the faith again” and to “rebuild their confidence” in church when they come to North America. The fellowship “fine-tuned” their program to care for non-believers and church goers among the HKDYA, but the ministry leaders seem to be in a dilemma in “adjusting the level of challenge to consider and what kind of depth to address in their teaching.”

This ministry leader said:

At the same time, some of our existing members tell us that the fellowship is like a bowl of soup. In the past, the soup is very thick, rich in flavor. And now it seems that the bowl of soup is being added with some additional water. That means the flavor is diluted. So we need to keep adjusting our programs and our teaching style so that we can on the one hand, help the members and the HKDYA who are in an earlier spiritual stage to grow.

And on the other hand, we also need to make the program more challenging to help more senior mature members. (Ministry Leader K)

One ministry leader mentioned about how the dynamics of the fellowship is also changing. He described how this fellowship is not really an “outreach fellowship.” He said:

It's more like a young adult fellowship for the early working age group. I think the dynamic is actually changing. Some of the existing people are actually looking for spiritual growth. A lot of HKDYA are non-believers. Our programs had to shift a bit to kind of balance the mix. (Ministry Leader L)

Another ministry leader mentioned about the struggle to care for each of the HKDYA because of differences in background. She said:

For most brothers and sisters in the fellowship, I guess there's a gap because they went to universities in Hong Kong and they've been working in Hong Kong for maybe like a few years. But for us in this fellowship, I guess like almost all of us went to universities in Canada and we don't have any Hong Kong working experience. We may not 100% understand the deep background, culture and those other kinds of things. (Ministry Leader J)

**Direction of the fellowship.** Two ministry leaders mentioned about how often they had to change their direction and schedule of the fellowship after September 2021. It was difficult to integrate the HKDYA and existing members to grow spiritually because if there was a program that week and there are HKDYA, they would have to introduce and welcome each other again. He added: “And how do we keep a balance of having a small number of brothers and sisters to support and go deep with each other, and at the same time have these HKDYA and get them to grow as well” (Ministry Leader M). Ministry Leader K mentioned that the past 15 months were quite turbulent for the leaders. However, he also commented: “But I'm thankful to them because they are willing to be flexible and they are willing to make changes in response to the needs of our HKDYA” (Ministry Leader K).

In summary, there were positive and negative experiences in supporting the HKDYA. The main four challenges were (1): lack of resources; (2) transportation; (3) caring and building

relationships; and (4) integration of HKDYA and existing members. This pushed the ministry leaders to consider changing the direction and purpose of the fellowship.

### *New Changes*

In regards to the fellowship, they adjusted the level of their teaching. They originally studied the letters of John, but because of the different stages of their spiritual journey and it was too difficult for the HKDYA, the ministry leaders decided to change the schedule and study the book of Joshua. One ministry leader shared, “We switch to the book of Joshua because this book deals with how Israel and the Jewish people coped with a new page in their life and how to cope with different transitions in their life” (Ministry Leader K). They were aware that the context of this book can be offensive in terms of the sacred war, so they attempted to focus on the topic of coping to a new life in a new place.

Another ministry leader mentioned about the changes in fellowship programs such as designing programs to get to know each other and adding Chinese characters and translation on PowerPoint slides that originally only had English text (Ministry Leader J). One ministry leader mentioned about having less focus on spiritual growth, but more on relationship building because many were HKDYA or non-believers (Ministry Leader I).

A professor from University of Toronto was also invited to share on a topic “Politics and Me.” There was a turnout of 70 people, but one leader commented that the HKDYA are still at the “echo chamber” stage. He explained:

They will only show up if they feel the occasion entertains the needs of the people; they are familiar with, people of similar background or similar age group. The drawback of the “echo chamber” is that this will only reinforce their existing way of thinking, and that may make them even more stubborn and even harder to change. It is inevitable that we need to group them together so as to raise their eagerness to learn other perspectives, and raise our chance to engage with them. (Ministry Leader K)

The welcoming ministry was also created because of the HKDYA. This team kept themselves updated regarding the HK pathway to provide corresponding support to the HKDYA (Ministry Leader L). They also now have a more formalized process in organizing the data about the HKDYA.

The leadership team was flexible with making changes to their ministry. One ministry leader mentioned:

As we are on this Hong Kong wave journey, we are taking a very flexible approach. So, we keep changing, right? If we see something that that is not working, we have to rethink it, but we have to make it work. And we try to be as agile and as flexible as we can. (Ministry Leader M)

The HKDYA were offered online discipleship courses and a marketplace course (aligned with the church's marketplace ministry) for Christian education. However, it was not as "successful" because of the timing and the design of the course and the design of the online course. One ministry leader said: "I think that the design of the online course itself, scared off the HKDYA. I think they may not be ready for interacting with so many existing members they do not know" (Ministry Leader K).

With all the changes made to the ministries, some ministry leaders feel that this is not enough. They would like to follow up with more HKDYA and care for more of them. One ministry leader said:

If it's enough, we're not growing and we want to grow. We are a growing community. There's so much to do. There's so much we can do. But it takes time, it takes patience, and most of all in God's timing. (Ministry Leader M)

Another ministry leader shared the difficulties in making adjustments to the teaching curriculum because the HKDYA's circumstances consistently change. They attempted to prepare the leaders to understand the needs and challenges of the HKDYA and existing members to respond to these changes. He said: "But I think we will not stop at this. We also will not feel

satisfied with what we have done. Because not just our existing members, the HKDYA' stages and circumstances will also keep changing" (Ministry Leader K). The leaders need to address the needs of the existing members and the HKDYA. They have been collecting feedback through meetings with the leaders and committee to see how to adjust their strategy.

In regards to the welcoming ministry, one ministry leader said that her team does not have the capacity to do more. She said:

I think what we're doing now is enough. I don't feel like we have the capacity or the ability to do more than what we're currently doing because ultimately the new caring ministry is just part of the many ministries that we have within the fellowship. We just can't put all our time, put all our resources in just this one ministry. We definitely will be doing what we're doing right now, but I don't see, I don't foresee we'll be able to do more than what we're currently doing. (Ministry Leader I)

Another ministry leader explained that they are not planning to expand the welcoming ministry, but would reconsider if there are more people coming from the HK wave, they would consider evolving their ministries to help build a better sense of belonging to the church for the HKDYA and involve them in other ministries (Ministry Leader L).

In summary, the ministry leaders adjusted the level of teaching, the teaching curriculum, program modifications and made new approaches to their ministries to better support the HKDYA.

### ***Definition of "Community"***

When ministry leaders were asked about what "community" means for them, common themes included: going through the same stages of life, being supported, and experiencing and journeying together in life. One ministry leader stated:

I think in order to establish that sense of community, you have a chance to go through the same stages of life, the same things. And it's just a feeling that the person or the people around you have been experiencing the same things that you have experienced so that they actually do understand you and they're able to help you whenever you need help. (Ministry Leader J)



Another ministry leader mentioned about his experience in this fellowship. He said:

We actually grow up together and struggle together. We care for each other not just because we know each other. It's more like we actually want to. We want to be part of your life and help them well, to see you achieve whatever goals you are aiming for.  
(Ministry Leader L)

One ministry leader equates community and family together. He explained:

Community is equivalent to family. That means when people encounter different kinds of challenge, apart from their friends and family members, I hope that church or the fellowship or the small group can emerge in their mind if they encounter any challenge.  
(Ministry Leader K)

### ***Church Leadership Support***

When ministry leaders were asked how the church could better support them, answers varied from having more available facility space and financial resources to opportunities to try new things, and more encouragement and appreciation.

**Facilities.** Some ministry leaders suggested to keep the church opened longer because the church closes at 10 PM on Fridays. Ministry Leader J shared that some fellowship members do not arrive at church until 7:45 to 8 PM, so the program time is rushed and they need more time to build relationships. There is also a need for more facility space because there are at least four fellowships sharing the facility rooms and it can be disruptive when other groups are talking or leading their program. Ministry Leader K shared about the limitations of the facility and how it is difficult to have a bigger space for their members. He also emphasized about the need for the HKDYA to have more face-to-face gatherings.

**Transportation and Financial Support.** Some ministry leaders vocalized about having more financial resources to subsidize the cost in driving the HKDYA or to have a church ride system on Fridays and Sundays to relieve stress from the leadership team. One ministry leader mentioned about having the church to financially support the welcome lunches for the ministry

team members. Currently, ministry members pay out of their own pockets when transporting HKDYA and also for their own meals during fellowships (Ministry Leader J).

**Connection.** Some ministry leaders mentioned that they feel disconnected with the church. One ministry leader said: “Sometimes I don't really know if the church is aware of our fellowship's current situation. They know there's a wave, but do they actually know how many people come to our fellowship or how much time we're putting into this” (Ministry Leader I)? This ministry leader also mentioned that it would be helpful to be appreciated or have some words of encouragement to support what they are doing in ministry.

Another ministry leader shared similar thoughts and said: “Sometimes ... it's kind of disconnected how the church sees us or sees our needs. I'm not sure how aware they are with all those HKDYA... coming in” (Ministry Leader L). This ministry leader suggested to have more face-to-face chat with the church leadership to know their needs better.

**Systems and Procedures.** One ministry leader shared about the difficulties with some of the church's “systems and processes” (Ministry Leader M). For example, they need to go through many hurdles with the church's leadership to deal with budgeted money. They are also in need of more leaders, but the church only allows ministry leaders to serve who have completed a membership course, but this course happens infrequently. As the “Hong Kong Wave is a very fast moving dynamic,” the ministry leader said that the church needs to have a quicker response to their needs.

**Care and Development for Leaders.** Some ministry leaders spoke about their concerns for the existing leadership team. One ministry leader shared:

I'm concerned for the ministry leaders because at this stage they keep giving, but they are not like getting much for themselves these days. They help to care about these HKDYA, drive them and do a lot of things for them. The whole fellowship's focus is mainly on

these HKDYA because it was overwhelming, and we haven't really thought of how we can better care of for our existing leaders well. (Ministry Leader J)

Ministry Leader M shared about the difficulty in providing a break or rest for the leaders as they are stretched thin. They hope to be able to develop more leaders especially from the HKDYA who came earlier. They also need time to discern, but this requires them to take themselves away a bit from the current ministry.

**New Initiatives.** Ministry Leader K shared about the thought of “launching a new expression of worship” for the HKDYA. There is currently another church that offered a worship service for the HKDYA from HK as a target group in their ministry. Although this was proposed during the pandemic, it was rejected. However, with the new changes from the immigration policies, this ministry leader hopes to review this proposal, and to engage more HKDYA and to help them settle.

Another ministry leader suggested to have older and more mature people to help the HKDYA about career path as the current members in the fellowship are also in a similar journey and learning. He said:

There's a lot of things we don't know or we don't have much experience on, so it's also good to listen for more advice or get more sharing from those people because they have much more experience, so that we don't have to detour from our path too much. (Ministry Leader L)

In summary, the ministry leaders suggested five areas of support for church leadership to consider (1) facilities open longer; (2), better transportation and financial support; (3) improve connection between church leadership and ministry leaders; (4) systems and procedures; (5) care and development of leaders; and (5) new initiatives.

## Discussion

In the following section, I consider how the aforementioned themes impact the HKDYA experiences of resettlement in Canada and the nurture of their new community in a Chinese church. I will also reflect theologically on these findings, with special attention to scripture's concept of church as hospitable community.

### Factors Contributing to Emigration

Following 2019, the HKDYA faced different political situations that impacted many spheres of their lives. They shared about changes to their views on freedom, immigration, family relations, faith community, and life in general. With their strong views of the government, the society and their community (family and church), four themes emerged: (1) freedom; (2) family; (3) faith; and (4) mental health. This eventually resulted in them emigrating to another country.

#### *Freedom*

All eight HKDYA expressed their restricted freedom from the impact of the political situation. This restricted freedom impacted their daily lives, speeches, actions, personal safety, relationships with people and their future outlook in Hong Kong. Hung Shin-Fung notes from *Breakthrough Youth Research Archives*: "A survey conducted in fall 2019 showed that 72.8 percent of the youth interviewees agreed that the problem with the extradition bill was that it threatens democracy, human rights, and the freedom of Hongkongers" (Hung in Kwok and Yip, 2021, p. 59). Not all of the HKDYA commented if they participated in the protest, but they all agreed that the political situation impacted their freedom and many areas of their lives.

#### *Family*

Five out of eight HKDYA spoke about the negative impact that their political views had in their relationship with parents. This negative impact included disagreements, arguments, and

avoidance around political topics. This correlates with Kwan's (2023) findings in which he discusses HK young adults' protest participation and the "tension in family relations" (p. 6): "Due to the different political viewpoints among family members, conflicts were common. These young adults would distance themselves from family members to avoid conflicts or reprimands" (p. 7). While the HKDYA in my study did not comment if they took part in the protest, the five HKDYA had different political viewpoints with their parents, which was the source of conflict for them.

### ***Faith***

Church community in HK was important for the HKDYA. More than half of the HKDYA mentioned that they regularly attended and served at their church. Three HKDYA said that their church community supported their decision to emigrate to a different country. To some HKDYA, the topic of faith and church community was a sensitive topic. Two people shared how the political situation impacted their faith negatively while they were in HK, with one person explicitly expressing her frustrations regarding her church's lack of conversations about the political situation in HK. Her church would avoid speaking about the political situation and the church's silence resulted in shaming of the young people. Louie (2020) reveals the motivation behind the rationale on the church's silence during the Anti-Extradition Movement. He notes: "Since politics is not spiritual and creates strife among Christians, the church should avoid touching any political topic...Silence is golden here, as the only way to preserve the unity of the church" (Louie, 2020, p. 210). Lee further comments:

Unfortunately, some conservative Christians have confused or distorted concepts to replace the separation of church and state with that of religion and politics. They requested churches to be 'neutral' on politics by not appreciating or mentioning any protests and even expect pastors to be mute on politics in both relational gatherings and private life. (Lee in Kwok and Yip, 2021, p. 153)

The political situation impacted them greatly, but some churches remained silent. It disappointed the young people to the extent they decided not to come back to church again. This disappointment also impacted the HKDYAs' faith in God as they witnessed the jolt of the political situation in all areas of life, including the violence and police brutality at the protests. One HKDYA debated the role of God, and another questioned, "Will God help us?"

Some churches, however, stood in solidarity and supported the protests by participating, caring for the protestors, or writing letters and statements to the government (Lee in Kwok-lan and Yip, 2021, 151).

### ***Mental Health***

The political unrest impacted some of the HKDYAs' mental wellbeing from the overall atmosphere to one's personal safety and feelings of distress. Chi Kin Kwan's (2023) study revealed "mental health deterioration" from her participants. Kwan (2023) highlights: "Whether young adults were intensively involved mentally or actively participating in the protests, varying signs of deteriorating psychological states were observed among them" (p. 5).

### ***Emigration***

Given these factors, the HKDYA were forced to make a life-changing decision to emigrate to Canada. They left HK: the place they were born, raised, and where their values were shaped. They left communities of people that they regularly met socially, including their family and for most, their faith communities. Given that the HKDYA were all young adults, they left behind careers they just started or were about to begin. They emigrated in search for greater freedom, a hope for a better future for themselves and for their next generation, without knowing what challenges they may face in a new country. For some, they had little to no time to consider

such a big decision because of their concern that countries would change immigration policies overnight. Some did not know if they would ever return to HK.

How can churches who receive the HKDYA help in these areas for “healing” of the trauma that they have experienced? How can the church help them process such a major life decision to leave their loved ones and country of their birth to emigrate to a country they know so little about and “start fresh”?

### **Reimagining Community in Canada**

When the HKDYA were asked about their challenges in settling in Canada, at least half of the HKDYA talked about the difficulties of finding a job and an affordable place to live. Three people highlighted the challenges with transportation and adapting to the cold weather. When church leaders were asked what they believed the HKDYA needed, four out of the five identified the need to find a job. Concerns about transportation and high rent were most common. These church leaders’ observations seemed to align with what the HKDYA vocalized as their challenges in settling in Canada.

The top three themes identified by at least half of the HKDYA were: (1) helping with settlement; (2) providing mental and emotional support; and (3) providing a welcoming and hospitable environment. This Canadian Chinese church, often at great costs, met some of the critical the needs of these HKDYA as they settled into their new country. Perhaps a stronger understanding of community from a biblical perspective can help them to be even more effective and strategic in this welcome ministry.

### ***Helping with Settlement***

It was interesting that the HKDYA did not specifically mention how this church community provided for their spiritual needs. The church gatherings included aspects of worship,

Bible study, topical discussions and fellowship gatherings on Friday nights, and Christian education classes on a weeknight. The practical challenges of settling into a new culture in Canada were often highlighted by the HKDYA as their immediate needs and may be of a higher priority to them than “spiritual” matters. Yet, buying and moving furniture, driving to different places, providing car maintenance, finding a family doctor, applying for an Ontario health card and identification, and understanding about Canadian life in Toronto can be a powerful way of embodying the presence of Christ. As Christ-followers, we proclaim the gospel in word and deed. Acts 4-5 describes the trials that the apostles faced, the early Christian community’s response (prayer and sharing possessions), and examples of people’s sacrifice for the good of the community. Fitzmyer (1998) commenting on Acts 5:12-16 notes:

The people who bring their sick to the Christians have obviously put their trust in them. Many must have been moved by faith in the Word that the apostles have been preaching...The faith and the good example of the apostles and other Christians have moved people to esteem them highly and put trust in them. Such traits manifest the Christians as a caring community. (p. 238)

This church resembles the early Christian church as caring communities that proclaim the gospel in word and deed, among themselves and in their worlds.

### ***Mental/Emotional Support***

Three HKDYA shared that they received mental and emotional support from this church community. One HKDYA emphasized that loneliness can be a significant mental issue for the HKDYA as they settle in a totally new environment in a foreign country. The church members took time to listen and support them through individual and group conversations. They walked alongside as they were going through their transition and experienced a true sense of belonging at this church. Pohl (1999) highlights how “focused attention communicates welcome” in



hospitable communities: “Over and over, guests and practitioners noted the importance of taking time to talk and to listen to people’s stories” (p. 137).

### *Welcome*

The HKDYA felt welcomed, loved, and supported through the members’ speech and actions. They felt especially included when they were invited into some of the members’ homes or when they were taken on short holiday trips. They appreciated how the leaders and members would give them rides to church and eat together after worship and other meetings. Pohl (1999) used Luke 14:15-24 and Matthew 25:31-46 to illustrate how hospitality meant welcoming the ones who lived on the margins and were vulnerable (p.24). More than showing kindness, this “welcome” reflects the image of the Kingdom of God and being invited to this feast where all would “experience blessing” and in return “reflects the welcome of God” (p. 26). The “welcome” of this church community reflected the welcome of God.

The ministry leaders expressed their gratitude in being part of this community and serving in this ministry. New friendships developed and they witnessed the HKDYA’ desire to explore Christianity. Pohl (2012) stated: “In a grateful community, individuals and their contributions are acknowledged and honored, and there is regular testimony to God’s faithfulness, through which the community experiences the joys of its members” (p.15).

Each ministry leader had their own definition of community. The common concepts included being in the same life stage, achieving something together, experiencing life together, and understanding each other. Two HKDYA also mentioned community takes place where they can practice faith together and build a relationship with God.

As much as the HKDYA were able to “reimagine community” in Canada, the leaders and members of the church community were also changing the way they “do community.” Robinson

(2006) emphasizes that the church is ultimately an “incarnational community” (p. 119). It is not just a “community” with a “sense of belonging” but a place where “lives were changed” by God (p. 120). Robinson (2006) reflects on Hadaway’s insights: “Rather than developing an array of sometimes-competing programs and jurisdictions...we nurture the church as incarnational community, one that is a social system of three interdependent parts: inviting, growing and sending” (p. 120). The church community supporting the HKDYA experienced transformation, becoming an incarnational community, and one that invites and grows. In 2021, a new welcoming ministry was formed to support the HKDYA. The level and depth of teaching was adjusted to accommodate the HKDYA’ diverse needs in their spiritual journey. The concept and purpose of small groups was adjusted to better accommodate the needs of all HKDYA.

While meeting the practical needs of the HKDYA, integrating them into the faith community helped them build relationships with the congregants and affirmed their faith. Some of the HKDYA said they were invited into people’s homes, shared meals on a weekly basis with church members in different restaurants, and explored the GTA neighbourhoods, in some ways a contextualization of Acts 2:44-47, where the early church was a close-knit community. Meeting outside of church, fellowship, small groups, and worship times helped the HKDYA build a new sense of community in their adopted country and church community. They “shared life” together in and outside of the church.

### **Church as a Hospitable Community**

Many of the HKDYA’s suggestions with regards to how this church could be a stronger “community” for them were focused not on church programs, but rather on the concept of hospitality. The HKDYA highlighted a caring atmosphere, opportunities to serve, being offered

transportation, and having deeper conversations. These issues connect with challenges they faced in the early stages of their settlement in Canada.

### *Expressions of Hospitality*

Pohl (1999) describes how offering hospitality and welcome to a stranger involves “...attentive listening and a mutual sharing of lives and life stories. It requires an openness of heart, a willingness to make one’s life visible to others, and a generosity of time and resources” (p. 18). Practical expressions of hospitality appear to be meeting the HKDYA’s immediate needs of resettlement. Although the topic of faith may not be brought up, such expressions of hospitality should not be underestimated in helping their reimagination of Christian community in Canada.

**Gatherings.** The HKDYA highlighted certain activities that helped them feel more connected and welcomed. These included doing things together outside of fellowship time, sharing meals and gatherings other than on a Friday “meeting” night. Some recalled how grateful they were when invited to short trips outside of Toronto. It was not only a change of scenery for them, but it also aided them to get to know other people and feel that sense of belonging.

Pohl (1999) highlighted hospitality as a way of “sharing their lives with the people who come to them” as opposed to performing a service (p. 60). A few of the HKDYA mentioned about visiting people’s homes and being invited to parties and how it helped them feel a real sense of belonging. David Fitch (2016) explores disciplines and practices that help form the church to be communities of faithful presence. He outlines the concept of the “three circles” where each resembles not only spaces of gathering for committed Christians, neighbours, and strangers, but it goes beyond the four walls of a church as a patterned movement of disciplines that mediate Christ’s presence (Fitch, 2016, p. 40). One of the circles has a dotted outline hosted

by Christian disciples where neighbors and strangers enter into this space (e.g., home setting) and together “watch what God is doing in this circle” (Fitch, 2016, p. 40). Church members live out this community of faithful presence as they invite the HKDYA to share their lives and spaces.

**Sharing Meals.** There seemed to be a special bond when people have food and eat together. Jesus was often sharing meals in different homes (e.g., Matthew 9:10-17, Luke 7:36). In Acts 2, sharing meals was part of their lives even as they worshipped God together. Pohl (1999) states: “Offers of food or a meal together are central to almost all biblical stories of hospitality, to most historical discussions of hospitality, and to almost every contemporary practice of hospitality” (p. 61). While food is the center of the meal it often connects people together. The act of sharing a meal is akin to “sharing life” as everyone needs to eat to survive. The HKDYA really appreciated the times when they were invited to people’s homes and shared a meal together. Some said they would like more of this. In Fitch’s (2016) “Three Circles,” he explains about the concept of the Lord’s Table in each of these spaces. He notes especially the dotted circle where the table extends beyond Christians, where Christians become the host for their neighbors (p. 56). While this can happen in homes, he notes: “It can happen wherever Christians meet regularly to share a meal in the hospitality of Christ’s presence together in the neighborhood” (p. 56).

**Serving.** Often the host may be expected to be the one to initiate and serve. However, some of the HKDYA shared that they would like to serve and volunteer in their new church community. They believe that they have something to offer, and it would also provide them with a sense of belonging and agency. In creating a hospitable space, guests can bring what they have to the table. This is not to say that each HKDYA should offer to serve immediately, as they need

time to settle, know and be known by the community. However, gradually, space can be offered for the HKDYA to explore what they would like to bring to the “table fellowship.” It is important for the church to be aware that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and we can all bring something to the table. As Nouwen (1986) states “...in the context of hospitality guest and host can reveal their most precious gifts and bring new life to each other” (p. 49). As the church community has offered their precious gifts, the HKDYA can also contribute and bring “new life” as they serve one another.

**Transportation.** Pohl (1999) highlights: “Making a place of hospitality requires creative thinking about finding ways to bring hospitality practices into connection with some of the particular features of contemporary life” (p. 129). Offering hospitality for the HKDYA is not limited to gathering spaces and communal meals. Many HKDYA do not have cars to travel to the church and they all live in different areas of the city and in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Providing transportation for the HKDYA provides an immediate physical need. It is one creative way of nurturing hospitality in this context.

### *Nuancing Pohl’s Theology of Hospitality for the Chinese Church*

Pohl’s theology of hospitality is helpful in articulating how this Chinese church extended hospitality to the HKDYA. However, there are a few ways in which Pohl’s theology of hospitality can be nuanced and contextualized for the Chinese church.

**Radical Acceptance.** Calida Chu, a Hong Kongese theologian at the University of Nottingham, comments: “Pastors have to deal with the trauma that Hong Kong people have experienced in feeling like their churches and government have abandoned or mistreated them... To evangelize effectively, we have to talk about the impacts of political tension” (Quoted in Ong, 2022, para. 60). One of the HKDYA mentioned how much she felt cared for when

people asked her about her thoughts and views about the political situation in HK and that some supported the social movement there. She shared that she felt more connected with the community when church members talked about how they kept up with the news in HK, and understood why she came here. She believed that creating a space to talk about these “controversial” issues in a respectful way may strengthen the existing bonds with the new church community. It was interesting that only one out of the eight HKDYA suggested this. Is this because most of the HKDYA experienced deep pain and division when sharing about the political situation in HK among their colleagues, families, or church community? Could they be fearful of repeating this trauma and rejection? Are there other political ramifications for having these conversations (e.g., spies in the congregation who may report them and harm their HK family members)? Are these conversations irrelevant now that they have settled in Canada?

Such a sensitive topic certainly needs to be handled with wisdom and may not be appropriate for discussion in every setting. However, if the church is a community of God’s people that exercises hospitality, can we shy away from these conversations? Can we create open and safe spaces for the HKDYA to talk about these issues that have affected them so deeply, and even changed their lives? Perhaps learning to listen and to respect diverse views as part of the body of Christ may be a healthy sign of this reimagined Christian community for the HKDYA.

Henri Nouwen (1986) notes:

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place...The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adapt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own. (p. 52-53)

For Nouwen, the core of hospitality is radical acceptance. It accepts the HKDYA for who they are, with their experiences as part of their identity. When we give ear to their stories, we receive them for who they are. Hospitality is not limited to a physical space; rather, it is a change in one's heart and attitude that allows for conversations to happen, relationships to develop and to "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15).

One wonders what hospitality in this church community would look like if HKDYA are welcomed into this "friendly emptiness." Can the church foster safe spaces and listening ears to the plight of our HKDYA friends regardless of one's political stance? Offering hospitality includes putting aside one's assumptions and there are many in a Chinese church with Cantonese, Mandarin, and English congregations, each with different links and histories with China. It allows people to share their thoughts, and perhaps process repressed emotions. The community of God's people can embrace HKDYA with God's love, walk with them as they process their past, receive healing, and begin a new life in Canada. Not all HKDYA may be comfortable talking about the situation in HK as it can bring traumatic memories, so this needs to be done carefully, with great sensitivity, respect and much wisdom. We are to create this empty space and not "fill up" the space.

In addition to having open safe spaces for conversations, reframing the teaching curriculum may be helpful for the HKDYA. Instead of Bible studies, one of the leaders mentioned how they had a few topical discussion nights to address the "three kinds of losses." This included addressing the HKDYA' "parents' loss of health" as they may feel a sense of guilt when they learn of their parents' health deteriorating, but they cannot go back to HK to care for them. The nature of such "loss" and how much these may impact their lives would be revealed over time.

**Rethinking the Concept of Host and Guest.** Pohl (1999) explains Jesus as host and guest: “This intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling for Christians. Jesus welcomes and needs welcome; Jesus requires that followers depend on and provide hospitality” (p. 23). Pohl’s arguments are helpful in understanding the importance of “intermingling” both roles, but the terms host and guest are understood hierarchically, particularly within Chinese culture. The person of Jesus may be capable of carrying two roles as one, but this segment of his Body is not so easily able to distinguish and reconcile two hierarchical roles. The terms also imply responsibilities and expectations. For hosts, there is an expectation to offer and give something. For guests, there is an expectation of receiving. The HKDYA are guests in this community, but when can they be seen as a host? The ministry leaders echoed the joys in serving the HKDYA, despite a lack of resources, manpower and “unending needs.” There is always a time and place for offering and receiving, but can there be a space where the host and guests can co-create in a non-hierarchical environment? Indeed, some HKDYA have asked for an opportunity to serve, which they said augments their sense of belonging in this new community.

Nouwen (1986) notes: “Maybe the concept of hospitality can offer a new dimension to our understanding of a healing relationship and the formation of a re-creative community in a world so visibly suffering from alienation and estrangement” (p. 49). Nouwen’s understanding of hospitality invites the HKDYA to co-create this kind of creative space in this community together with the “host”. This can include serving together, but is not limited to only practical expressions of hospitality (e.g., gatherings and sharing meals together). The HKDYA and ministry leaders can start with conversations of what kind of community they would like to build together for the present and also the future.



## **Needs of Ministry Leaders**

This healing and formation of a re-creative community extends to the ministry leaders and members who live out practical expressions of hospitality.

### ***Support***

The ministry leaders shared about struggles with manpower and a lack of resources amidst increasing number of new immigrants every week. This also led to a lack of meeting space and financial support issues as they graciously drive many HKDYA home on a weekly basis. There needs to be more communication between church leadership and the leaders of the ministry so church leadership can be aware of these pressing needs. Church leadership can consider allocating more resources to support this ministry. They can recruit new leaders who are not part of this ministry and even begin recruiting the HKDYA for different serving and volunteer opportunities. They can provide more flexible and ongoing training for new recruits to equip and prepare them to serve. Church leadership can also discuss with leaders to determine a reasonable financial budget, so that the leaders and existing members of the community are compensated and do not always have to pay for gas and meals at their own expense.

Pohl (1999) mentioned about the difficulties in practicing hospitality and the need to “consider the well-being of hosts as well as guests” (p. 101). Pohl (1999) explains:

It is here that we quickly encounter struggles with limits and boundaries because physical and emotional strength, space, food, and other resources are finite. While God often supplies these miraculously, hosts still must make hard choices about how to distribute resources, expend energy, and focus ministry. (p. 101)

### ***Encouragement***

One of the ministry leaders talked about receiving encouragement and appreciation from the church. Although only one ministry leader mentioned this, this acknowledgement helped them feel valued especially as the team of ministry leaders faced many hurdles over these past

two years. Pohl (2012) identifies some of the complications in gratitude and she highlights how “the offering of thanks is an expression of respect for a relationship” (p. 22). This is applicable for the leaders who are serving in this community. These are ministry leaders who see the needs of the community and do their best with the given resources. As Pohl (2012) acknowledges, these leaders can be “taken for granted by the community.” (p. 23). The ministry leaders serving in this community may not expect any praise from the people they are serving, but church leadership ought to consider showing some appreciation to these leaders.

### ***Combating “Burnout”***

As an extension of being in a community that extends hospitality, it would be helpful to care and follow-up with the leaders. Pohl (2012) identifies that: “attending to the personal development of volunteers is a way that leaders can express their gratitude” (p. 26). One of the ministry leaders in the study mentioned about wanting to discern the direction for this community, but this requires time away from their own community. To build on this concept of discernment, Pohl (2012) also highlights the importance of Sabbath (p. 89). Pohl (2012) states: “Communities of hospitality also learn how important it is to set aside time for rest and renewal” (p. 89).

Fitch (2016) compares the consequences and implications regarding “the church of maintenance” and “the church of exhaustion” (p. 182). He highlights: “The church of maintenance will die a slow death as it focuses on the close circle, providing goods and services as efficiently and relevantly as possible to the already existing aging Christians in the church” (p. 182). This church serves beyond the “close circle.” They minister to the HKDYA that were on different faith journeys. However, as they explore how to serve both the existing and new members, if they are not careful, they can become the church of exhaustion. Fitch (2016) notes:

“The church of exhaustion, on the other hand, eventually runs out of resources and inspiration. It somehow separates the half circles of our lives, where we meet the broken and hurting, from the encounter with the living, resurrected Christ” (p. 182). To prevent this from happening, the ministry leaders need to consider spending time in discernment, setting time to rest and explore other creative ways of ministering to this group of people. Pohl (1999) comments:

A life of hospitality is much less about dramatic gestures than it is about steady work – faithful labor that is undergirded by prayer and sustained by grace. When hosts are nourished amid providing hospitality, they find an internal peace essential for making others feel comfortable, safe and welcome in their presence. (p. 140)

### ***Reimagining “Programs”***

Adapting to the different needs for both the existing members and the HKDYA seems to be a dilemma for both groups to disciple each member and develop their spiritual maturity. Each person came with their own experiences and their own walk with Jesus. Some HKDYA are non-Christians while some are not regular church attendees. One HKDYA mentioned how the vocabulary and conversations during Bible studies and worship services were too difficult to understand for non-Christians and those new to the Christian faith. The ministry leaders readjusted the gatherings to better accommodate and be sensitive to new Christians and those exploring the Christian faith. For example, they adjusted their level of teaching for the Bible studies and designed more “get to know each other” social activities. However, it remains a continuous challenge to be able to incorporate both groups and the members’ different changing needs.

Craig Van Gelder (2007) uses the early church in Acts to illustrate how they used intentional strategies to ministry to people, but these strategies can be “redirected at times in how a strategy is actually carried out” (p. 59). Van Gelder (2007) points out two patterns in the book of Acts:

There is intentional, planned activity that leads to growth—a strategy as illustrated in the work of the apostles and Paul’s mission team. But there is also the Spirit’s leading of the church in or through conflict, disruption, interruption, and surprise into new and unanticipated directions that resulted in growth. (p. 60)

This Chinese church implements various kinds of ministry changes as they welcomed these new HKDYA. They are going through different changes compared to the early church in Acts, but they can be encouraged that this is part of the process in the growth of a new community group.

In a community of God’s people that lives out hospitality, how can space be created to allow for both existing members and the HKDYA to grow and mature in Christ? As much as growing together is encouraged, can there be different opportunities to grow separately as well? This is not to exclude either group, but perhaps, there can be opportunities for members to choose to participate in specific program gatherings. For example, there could be one evening each month that two different levels of programs are offered to meet the needs of different groups. One program could be a lighter level of teaching and the other could be a more in-depth or topical program. The members can choose which program they would like to join. One ministry leader also suggested to launch a new worship service specifically for the HKDYA. This can be another opportunity for this church to expand their ministry initiatives for the HKYDA.

## **Hospitality Extended**

### ***Church Wide Involvement***

As God is working in and through the leaders who are supporting the HKDYA, the entire church and congregants from different generations can also participate in support. Providing hospitality would not be limited or responsible to only one fellowship group. Providing recommendations for buying groceries, house maintenance, car maintenance, and providing

transportation are just some of the ways the entire church can provide a practical sense of hospitality in community.

There were suggestions of developing intergenerational relationships with older congregants with different life experiences. One HKDYA observed that this church consisted of many different generations of HK people who immigrated to Canada. This HKDYA suggested to have the older congregants share their stories in settling in Canada. The HKDYA would also share about their experiences in HK and the reasons why they came to Canada. This would be a great opportunity for intergenerational friendships and relationships to be developed in this community. One ministry leader mentioned about having the older congregants meet with the HKDYA to share their work experiences and provide coaching and advice for their career path. Many existing members are similar in age as the HKDYA and on their own journey to discover their own personal career path. This can be an opportunity for mentorship as the older congregants have much knowledge and experience to offer.

Sharing meals is one of the expressions of hospitality. This expression can allow other congregational members to participate and host the HKDYA. If other congregants are interested in hosting the HKDYA once or twice a month, this can help share the load with the leaders. This will allow the HKDYA get to know more people and experience different familial settings as new hosts are recruited to serve. These new host congregants will have the opportunity to get to know more HKDYA and develop new friendships.

### ***Church Partnerships***

Churches with HKDYA should consider partnering with other churches and organizations locally in offering hospitality to the HKDYA. Pohl (1999) highlights: “The gift of hope embedded in these communities of hospitality nourishes, challenges, and transforms guests,

hosts, and, sometimes, the larger community” (p. 17). This can be an opportunity for the church to do ecumenical work together for the kingdom of God like how the churches in the UK are partnering together to start campaigns and welcome the HK diaspora (Mcdade, 2021, para. 8). With the increase of HK immigrants, having committed partnerships with other churches would benefit both the HKDYA and their church leaders.

The HKDYA mentioned their difficulty with transportation. It can be a challenge for these HKDYA to travel a long distance to churches that are in suburban communities where transportation may not be as convenient or available. It is also common for HKDYA to relocate a few times as many are renting spaces. Having church partnerships can allow other church communities in their home area to provide support for them. Churches can partner with a few other churches to host a communal gathering so the HKDYA can meet other people and build connections and friendships. The CANHK portal is one initiative started by Our Common Calling (a partnership formed by Evangelical Fellowship of Canada [EFC], Lausanne Canada, the Canadian Centre for Christian Charities [CCCC], and Christian Higher Education Canada [CHEC]), that aims to welcome HK HKDYA, connect them to churches and provides a platform to access information for their settlement (CANHK | Welcome to Canada, 2023, para. 2). This is an initiative that churches can be a part of to make connections with other churches around the area. Partnering together can benefit churches and their leaders as they share experiences, resources, joys, challenges, and new ministry opportunities in responding to the HK wave. Leaders can learn from each other and bring their insights and apply it to their individual church context. Furthermore, leaders can encourage and support each other as many diverse churches are learning how to respond better to the increasing wave of HK people. With this ecumenical work, churches will collaborate more, not because of a lack of resources, but because we are all

called to be a community of God's people beyond the four walls of our churches as Christ appoints us to be his "... witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

### **Conclusion**

This research emerged four factors (freedom, family, faith, and mental health) that contributed to the HKDYA' reasons of emigrating from HK because of the post 2019 protests. The HKDYA' concept of "community" evolved as they faced new challenges settling in Canada. This Chinese church aided their settlement, provided mental and emotional support, and a hospitable space and environment. Suggestions from HKDYA on how this church can be a more hospitable community includes: (1) having a caring atmosphere; (2) serving together; (3) providing transportation; and (4) engaging in deep conversations. This largely aligns with Pohl's reflections on the church's biblical expressions of hospitality. In contextualizing Pohl's theology of hospitality for this church community, radical acceptance and reimagining the concept of host and guest may need to be considered. This research also revealed the ministry leaders' needs and requirements in areas of support, encouragement, and combatting "burnout". Church as a hospitable community proclaiming the kingdom in word and deed must extend beyond one fellowship to include other churches sharing responsibility to develop wider partnerships.

There are limitations to this study. I have only interviewed eight HKDYA and five ministry leaders from one Canadian Chinese church. More participants from this church can strengthen the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. All the HKDYA had a positive experience and continue to attend this church. Not all HKDYA who visited and attended this church stayed, and it would be interesting to have their perspective for a more wholistic understanding of their resettlement and ideas about community. It would also be instructive to

interview other churches who are supporting the HKDYA. Interviewing both HKDYA and ministry leaders from other churches would provide a contrasting and multi-ethnic understanding of community and may add further insights on how to better support the HKDYA. Hospitality is one of many theological lenses in how the church responded to the HKDYA' needs. It would be helpful to explore other theological lenses and multi-ethnic theologians with their perspectives.

Mary Clark Moschella notes that “pastoral theology has always been about the telling of lives and changing of lives.” In this project, I sought through honest listening to seek to understand a people’s complex issues, hopes, and dreams, engage in pastoral reflection, and guide them toward more “intentional faith practices....” Following Moschella, I tried to weave human and divine stories, co-authoring the future for a more faithful way of existence in the world before God (Moschella, 2008, 11, 18, 237-40).



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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

Questions for the HK Diaspora Young Adults:

1. When did you arrive in Canada?
2. Are you with your immediate family members? Relatives and/or friends?
3. Will other family members plan to come to Toronto?
4. What does “community” mean for you? How, if ever, was that experienced in HK? How, if ever, was it experienced in your faith community?
5. How did the recent political changes impact you (e.g., Views on freedom, immigration, family, life in general, and your faith?)
6. What made you finally decide to leave your community? How, if any, did your faith or church community impact this decision?
7. Why did you choose to come to Toronto, Canada?
8. What challenges did you face settling in Canada? What are your current challenges?
9. How did you come to be connected with church?
10. Does this church reflect the “community” you envisioned? Why or why not?
11. How, if in any way, did this church help you to be more settled?
12. What do you need from a community that would help you feel welcomed? How can the leaders and members help you to be more connected in this community?

Questions for the ministry leaders:

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you attended church?
3. What is your leadership role at church? How long have you been serving in this position/role?
4. What has been your experience in supporting the HK diaspora young adults? What do you see as their main needs?
5. What are the struggles in supporting the HK diaspora young adults?
6. What does “community” mean for you?
7. What changes have been made to your ministry in welcoming the HK diaspora young adults to this community?
8. Do you sense this is enough? Why? What more, if any, needs to be done?
9. How can the church better support you?