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Chinese Migrants' Class Mobility in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Resources such as education and social networks are likely to contribute to migrants' upward mobility in the class hierarchy. Moreover, according to structural fit theory, the contribution tends to be contingent on age and social network size. The contingency is the major concern of the present study of mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong, which is somewhat different from the Chinese mainland economically, politically and even culturally. In this study, we show that the conditions for upward mobility are some human and social resources and their various combinations. Notably, schooling after arrival in Hong Kong contributed more to the upward mobility of the migrant who was younger or had a larger social network at the time of arrival in Hong Kong. Purportedly, promoting the migrant's integration with the school and local social network would prepare the migrant for upward mobility.

INTRODUCTION

It has been important to study class mobility because it records many favourable outcomes, including the person's achievement, self-actualisation and social solidarity, and the fairness, opportunity and openness of human society (Grusky and Sorensen, 1998; Jones, 2003; Kaufman, 2003). As such, class mobility can be an indicator of a good society (Galbraith, 1996). Class mobility is particularly a concern in the study of migrants, whose geographical mobility probably precipitates class mobility. Accordingly, migrants are especially likely to experience upward and downward class mobility from the origin to the destination (Rooth and Ekberg, 2006). Since migrants tend to differ from non-migrants in many background characteristics, the class mobility of migrants requires specific research attention. Research on migrants' class mobility is also relevant to the examination of discrimination or exploitation in the host society (Cranford, 2005). Such research is vital in order to clarify the determinants of class mobility.

While various forms of resources, capital or assets are likely determinants of class mobility in theory, the conditions for their determination have been somewhat obscure. Accordingly, it is unclear which resources are important in general and under specific conditions. Even though education is a prominent resource that generally contributes to upward mobility in the class hierarchy, the contribution is likely to be conditional. According to structural fit theory, one condition is the fit of the resource to the person and to the society (David et al., 1989; Scheerens and Bosker, 1997).

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Nevertheless, empirical support has not been for the usefulness of the theory in the prediction of the migrant's class mobility. Such acquisition is the goal of the present study of the class mobility of mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong, after the territory's unification with China.

Hong Kong is a suitable place for the study because the mainland Chinese migrants who have arrived since 1997 now account for 9.4 per cent of the population. Since 1995, the government of Hong Kong has raised its daily quota for mainland Chinese migrants from 105 to 150, which means 54,750 migrants a year. In 2006, for instance, the number of the migrants was 54,170, which was close to the quota, according to the governmental release of statistics. The current number of mainland Chinese migrants is therefore twice that in 1992. About two-thirds of the migrants originate from Guangdong Province, which is contiguous with Hong Kong. Around 5 per cent of the migrants leave from Fujian Province, which borders on Guangdong Province. The identification of migrants from the two nearby provinces is important in view of the contribution of the vicinity of their origin to employment (van Tubergen et al., 2004).

In this study, we focus on the class mobility of Chinese mainland migrants who were neither students nor retirees at the time of the survey in Hong Kong. These migrants' class mobility in Hong Kong will shed new light on research and theory about class mobility because of the unique features of the migration; namely, migration from a socialist Chinese society (the mainland) to a capitalist Chinese society (Hong Kong), involving migrants and host-society members of Chinese ethnicity. Because the ethnicity is the same, mainland migrants to Hong Kong seem to be indistinguishable by appearance, and they can permeate everywhere in Hong Kong without encountering segregation and exclusion. However, this does not mean that mainland migrants do not face discrimination and hardship that may impede their class mobility. The impediments arise due to mainland migrants' acculturation problems and the prejudices of the local Hong Kong population. Such problems emerge because mainland migrants tend to speak a language and practice a lifestyle that is different from those of Hong Kong natives (Lai, 2001). Notably, even mainland migrants coming from Guangdong Province tend to speak a kind of Cantonese that is noticeably different from the Cantonese spoken in Hong Kong (Adamson and Lai, 1997). Hence, mainland migrants are still distinguishable by their dialects or accents, despite their similarity with Hong Kong natives in a number of bodily characteristics.

Class mobility is clearly a concern of mainland migrants coming to Hong Kong, as they usually regard Hong Kong as a paradise of opportunity (Chiu et al., 2005). Such opportunities include careers in entertainment, in financial speculation and in personal service operations such as beauty salons, which are lucrative in Hong Kong's capitalist system (Chan, 2000; Estes, 2002). Under the socialist regulated-market system on the mainland, such careers are only sporadically available and financially gainful. To make a difference in Hong Kong, the migrants tend to adapt to Hong Kong quickly in order to realize their class mobility (Lam and Liu, 1993). They also represent a vital force that is helping to build Hong Kong (Yip and Lee, 2000). Nevertheless, mainland migrants earn less and settle at a lower class in Hong Kong than Hong Kong natives (Chiu et al., 2005). The class mobility of the mainland migrants depends on their class backgrounds and other resources, and on their parents or families (Chiu et al., 2005). This basis for class mobility is common in Western and industrialized societies (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Ishida, 1993). However, the exact conditions leading to class mobility in Hong Kong are unclear, and their clarification is my major objective in the present study.

Class mobility

Before we investigate the conditions for class mobility, we need to depict the nature of class mobility in Hong Kong. The depiction starts with the identification of six social classes, as follows: (1) not being in employment, or in a "surplus class" (Class 1); (2) having a working-class or manual occupation (Class 2); (3) having a middle-class, clerical or routine non-manual occupation (Class 3); (4) hav-

ing an upper-middle-class, professional or managerial occupation (Class 4); (5) being a member of the petty ownership class, or being self-employed (Class 5); and (6) being a member of the ownership class, or an employer (Class 6) (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Hagan, 1988; Kingston, 2000). The differentiation of these classes reflects differential access to capital, managerial authority, expertise and other means of production (Wright, 1997). Class mobility then refers to the change from the class membership before migration to that after migration. More specifically, upward class mobility takes two forms: (1) changing to a higher class, excluding entry into self-employment; and (2) changing from non-employment to self-employment. Upward mobility therefore involves a change from Class 1 to Classes 2, 3, 4 or 6; from Class 2 to Classes 3, 4 or 6; from Class 3 to Class 4 or Class 6; from Class 4 to Class 6; or from Class 5 to Class 6. Conversely, downward class mobility takes two forms: (1) changing to a lower class, excluding exit from self-employment; and (2) changing from self-employment to not being employed. Upward and downward mobility therefore do not include the transition between being an employee and self-employment.

Resource theory

Resource theory summarizes the contributions of human capital, cultural capital, social capital and other resources to a person's class mobility (Steelman et al., 2002). Human capital refers to resources that are inherent in and inalienable from the person, and beneficial in various situations. Components of human capital that have appeared to contribute to class mobility include education, health, physical ability and work experience (Akresh, 2006; De Jong and Madamba, 2001; Knight and Song, 2005; Konrad et al., 2005; Waldinger, 2007). Cultural capital refers to resources that are consistent with or useful to the specific culture (Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007). The specific usefulness of cultural capital within a cultural context makes it different from the generic value of human capital across contexts (Steelman et al., 2002). A typical form of cultural capital related to class mobility is proficiency in a language such as Cantonese, which is a means of affiliation with Cantonese-speaking people, but not with those who speak other languages (Goldstein, 2003). In particular, proficiency in the language used in the host society is a form of cultural capital that is conducive to the migrant's upward mobility (Duvander, 2001). Fluency in Cantonese is an indicator of cultural capital for mainland migrants in Hong Kong (Adamson and Lai, 1997). Social capital refers to connections to people who can prove to be helpful (Flap and Volker, 2001). Such people, who can help the individual to achieve class mobility, include parents, siblings and friends (Aguilera, 2002; Maste-kaasa and Dale-Olsen, 2000). The contribution of the various resources to class mobility stems from the premise that resources represent power that can fuel action for goal attainment (Rettig et al., 1999). Resource theory underpins the examination of the main effects of education, work experience and fluency in Cantonese before migration, social network size soon after migration, and schooling, together with any increase in education and in fluency in Cantonese since migration. The resources that have been demonstrated to affect class mobility include education, work experience, language use and having relatives (Akresh, 2006; McGinnity et al., 2005).

Despite the theory and research findings that have demonstrated the influences of various resources, the kinds of, and conditions for, resources to contribute to a migrant's class mobility are unclear. Apart from the problem of fragmentary research evidence, the existing findings concerning migrants are clearly inconsistent. Hence, human, cultural and social capital are not always conducive to a migrant's class mobility. The inconsistent findings include the null and negative effects of education (Aguilera, 2003), language proficiency and association with siblings and friends on class mobility (Aguilera, 2003; Knight and Song, 2005). Complicating the influence is the timing of the availability of the resource, before or after migration. Apparently, resources that are available before migration show more consistent impacts on class mobility than do those acquired after migration (Akresh, 2006).

Structural fit as a condition for resource contribution

Structural fit theory provides an elaboration of the conditions for the functioning of resources, involving such forms of human capital as schooling, and social capital in the form of the social network. The theory principally maintains that a resource functions effectively when it fits the social structure (David et al., 1989; Scheerens and Bosker, 1997). This theory has been useful for explaining organisational and personal performance in terms of the fit between organisational structure and resources. The former includes connectivity among organisational members, and the latter includes cooperation, collaboration, interdependence and strategic action. For instance, organisational resources such as cooperation can be most effective in an organisation that is characterized by a structure that involves connectivity. A generalisation of the structural fit into the societal setting demonstrates that a person's education is more salutary to someone who gets more support from his or her social network (Frytak et al., 2003). This is because the acceptance of social support tends to increase with advancing education (Keyes and Shapiro, 2004). Furthermore, education or cognitive ability is more beneficial to someone who is younger, supposedly because the use of cognitive ability to learn from education is a strength of such a person (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Schieman, 2001). Education is therefore likely to be more functional when it helps someone who is younger, or who receives more support from his or her social network.

In line with the expectations of structural fit theory, research dealing with immigrants has found the following personal conditions for the contribution of structural resources. Participation in ethnic (Chinese) cultural activity makes a stronger contribution to the self-esteem of Chinese immigrants residing in a neighbourhood composed of other Chinese residents (Schnittker, 2002). In this case, the participation fits in with the Chinese characteristics of the neighbourhood. Conversely, a Chinese immigrant's self-esteem is higher when he or she uses English more dominantly in a neighbourhood composed largely of English-speaking residents (Schnittker, 2002). The language use then fits the communication style of the neighbourhood. An employee hired by a co-ethnic employer attains a higher wage and social class when the employee has more co-ethnic friends (Reitz and Sklar, 1997). In this case, the employment tends to fit the employee's ethnic affiliation. The use of English is more conducive to getting a high wage for an employee than for a self-employed immigrant (Reitz and Sklar, 1997). Language use tends to fit employment better than self-employment, probably because of the differential need for communication in the work setting. School achievement is better in an immigrant child who is fluent in the ethnic language and whose parents use the ethnic language (Mouw and Xie, 1999). A child's ethnic language use then fits his or her parents' ethnic language use. Furthermore, the contribution of the fit reflects two elaborations of structural fit theory; namely, life course theory and social capital theory.

Life course theory conveys the structural fit in terms of synchronicity between a person's age and his or her resources (Dewilde, 2003). Accordingly, a resource is functional only when it is on schedule in relation to the person's age or life course. Schooling is typically helpful to the school-age person, as a way of registering a structural fit. This is because schooling is the norm for the school-age person, and deviation from the norm, or becoming off schedule, would prove to be stressful (Clausen, 1986).

Social capital theory maintains that social capital is helpful when it amplifies the benefits of human capital (Huang and Lin, 2008). The amplification effect occurs when social capital or the social network propagates and regulates the strength of each member of the network. Reinforcement, recognition and positive feedback are instances in which social network members strengthen the functioning of each member's human capital (Brisson and Usher, 2005). Additionally, the social network can provide information and advice that aids realisation of the contribution of human capital, such as in job referral (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002). Such amplification explains how the social capital of the social network enhances the benefit of the human capital gained through schooling.

In facilitating the migrant's upward mobility, human capital refers specifically to an increase in schooling or education after arrival in Hong Kong; age refers specifically to age at arrival in Hong Kong; and the social network refers specifically to the contacts that evolve after arrival in Hong Kong. Logically, the human and social capital acquired in a host society fit, or facilitate recognition of, the structure of that society. Also for structural fit, age at arrival is relevant rather than current age because of its synchronicity with the functioning of schooling and the social network. The application of structural fit theory to prediction of the migrant's upward mobility then leads to the following two major hypotheses and their subdivisions (note that schooling is different from a grade increase, because schooling may involve the repetition of a grade attended before migration):

Hypothesis 1.1: A grade increase in education after migration contributes more to a younger migrant's upward mobility.

Hypothesis 1.2: Schooling after migration contributes more to a younger migrant's upward mobility.

Hypothesis 2.1: A grade increase in education after migration contributes more to a migrant with a larger social network.

Hypothesis 2.2: Schooling after migration contributes more to a migrant with a larger social network.

Testing of the contributions of resources and the above hypotheses requires the estimation of effects that are independent of those produced by some basic background characteristics. Notably, age has appeared to influence both class mobility and various resources, including educational attainment, health, language proficiency and social networking (Feliciano, 2005; McGinnity et al., 2005). Duration of residence tends to affect acculturation and adaptation to the host society, and hence the duration may contribute to class mobility and resource acquisition (van Tubergen, 2005; Walters et al., 2007). Notably, a migrant who has stayed in the host society longer is likely to accede to a higher social class (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2003). Migration from a neighbouring place, such as Guangdong Province or Fujian Province, is also likely to facilitate the migrant's access to resources and class mobility. For example, geographical proximity is a condition for social networking (Dominguez and Watkins, 2003).

METHODS

A survey of 629 Chinese mainland migrants in Hong Kong in 2006 provided data for the study. Because mainland migrants were dispersed everywhere throughout Hong Kong, we considered soliciting social service agencies that had contact with the migrants an efficient way to locate them. The agencies, which received support from the government, played a significant role in facilitating migrants' adaptation to Hong Kong. As such, the agencies maintained contact with migrants once they had arrived in Hong Kong. Among 50 such agencies that were approached, 30 lent support in order to locate 1,456 mainland migrants. Of these migrants, those 629 migrants who were neither students nor retirees constituted the study sample. These migrants completed survey questionnaires at the premises of the social service agencies, in the presence of research personnel, who administered the questionnaires.

On average, the sampled migrants had lived in Hong Kong for 4.5 years (see Table 1), with a minimum of zero and a maximum of 14 years. These migrants had an average age of 40.2 at the time of the survey and an average age of 35.6 at the time of arrival in Hong Kong. The majority of them (83.3%) were women, which probably reflects the fact that many of them were wives of Hong Kong residents. This is because many men in Hong Kong choose to marry women from the mainland (Yip and Lee,

2000). Before arrival, their average school grade was 6.1 years (with Primary 1 as the base 1). Since arrival, they had attended school for an average of 8.8 months. On average, this schooling was insufficient to raise the migrant's education by one grade. Upon their arrival in Hong Kong, the migrants reported that they had an average of 0.1 parent, 0.5 sibling and 4 friends in Hong Kong. Only 4.3 per cent of them reported having a chronic illness or disability before arrival in Hong Kong. Most of them (81.5%) came from Guangdong Province, which is adjacent to Hong Kong. In addition, 5.1 per cent of them had migrated from Fujian Province, which is adjacent to Guangdong Province. The migrants rated their fluency in Cantonese, on average, as 61.9 (on a scale from 0 to 100) before arrival and 68.0 after arrival in Hong Kong. They therefore had an average increase of 6.1 points on the scale in fluency in Cantonese. In addition, social network size referred to the average of the standard scores of the number of parents, siblings and friends that the respondent reported that he or she had upon arrival in Hong Kong.

Both before and after arrival at Hong Kong, the majority of the migrants were in a lower social class. About half of them had not been in employment before arrival, but almost two-thirds of them were not in employment after arrival (see Table 1). The increase in those who were not employed was most significant. Conversely, fewer people were members of the middle class or the upper class after arrival than before arrival. Some class mobility was therefore observable.

Analytical procedure

Multinomial logit analysis estimated the effects of various predictors on upward mobility and the absence of any mobility, as compared with downward mobility. This analysis operated twice, to handle data from all migrants and those from employed migrants before migration, respectively. The latter exercise was comparable to studies focused on the working population, whose class mobility was of particular concern. For ease of interpretation, the estimated effects from the analysis were couched in terms of marginal effects; namely, the change in percentage points of class mobility due to the change of each predictor, when the chance of class mobility was at the sample's average level.

RESULTS

More (58.5%) of the Chinese mainland migrants exhibited no class mobility than either downward mobility (29.3%) or upward mobility (12.2%), since migration to Hong Kong (see Table 1). Their chance of achieving class mobility was at the sample's average level. In contrast, very few migrants became self-employed (0.5%) or moved across ownership statuses (1.3%), from employees to employers or the self-employed and vice versa. Overall, 39.1 per cent of the migrants remained not employed, and this number represented two-thirds of those migrants who did not show class mobility.

Of the 311 migrants who had been in employment before arriving in Hong Kong, only five (1.6%) experienced upward class mobility. In contrast, most of them (184, 59.2%) experienced downward mobility and 122 (39.2%) stayed in their original classes. Among the 318 who had not been in employment before migration, 72 (22.6%) exhibited upward class mobility while 246 (77.4%) remained not employed. Most (93.5%) migrants with upward mobility had not been in employment before migration.

Predicting class mobility

In the analysis of data from all sampled migrants, significant predictors of both upward mobility and immobility, as compared with downward mobility, were male gender, an origin in Guangdong Province and social network size (see Table 2). At the average level of mobility, men were 6.2 per-

TABLE 1

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (N = 629)

Variable	Scoring	*M*	*SD*
Duration of residence in Hong Kong (0–14)	Years	4.5	3.7
Age at arrival in Hong Kong (5–69)	Years	35.6	8.8
Age (17–70)	Years	40.2	9.4
Grade before arrival in Hong Kong	Years	7.8	3.1
Grade increase after arrival in Hong Kong	Years	0.0	1.2
Fluency in speaking Cantonese before arrival in Hong Kong	0–100	61.9	36.3
Increase in fluency in speaking Cantonese since arrival in Hong Kong	0–100	6.1	29.5
Work experience before arrival in Hong Kong	Years	6.1	7.3
Schooling since arrival in Hong Kong	Months	8.8	27.5
Parents upon arrival in Hong Kong	Number	0.1	0.3
Siblings upon arrival in Hong Kong	Number	0.5	1.0
Friends upon arrival in Hong Kong	Number	4.0	10.7
Female	0, 100	83.3	
Having a disability or chronic illness before arrival in Hong Kong	0, 100	4.3	
Coming from Guangdong Province	0, 100	81.5	
Coming from Fujian Province	0, 100	5.1	
Social class before arrival in Hong Kong			
Not in employment	0, 100	50.6	
Working class (manual)	0, 100	28.6	
Middle class (routine non-manual, clerical)	0, 100	12.1	
Upper middle class (professional, managerial)	0, 100	4.1	
Petty ownership class (self-employed)	0, 100	3.2	
Ownership class (employer)	0, 100	1.4	
Social class after arrival in Hong Kong			
Not in employment	0, 100	65.0	
Working class (manual)	0, 100	26.6	
Middle class (routine non-manual, clerical)	0, 100	5.6	
Upper middle class (professional, managerial)	0, 100	1.1	
Petty ownership class (self-employed)	0, 100	1.0	
Ownership class (employer)	0, 100	0.8	
Class mobility since arrival in Hong Kong			
Downward	0, 100	29.3	
No change	0, 100	58.5	
Upward	0, 100	12.2	

centage points higher on the scale with regard to the chance of upward mobility and 13.8 percentage points higher with regard to the chance of immobility than were women. Migrants from Guangdong Province were 7.2 percentage points higher with regard to the chance of upward mobility and 7.6 percentage points higher with regard to the chance of immobility. A migrant with a social network that was one standard deviation larger at the time of arrival in Hong Kong was 3.1 percentage points higher with regard to the chance of upward mobility and 3.5 percentage points higher with regard to the chance of immobility. Furthermore, the migrant's educational grade before arrival in Hong Kong was significantly predictive of upward mobility. A person who was 10 years higher in educational grade was 7.9 percentage points higher in upward mobility. The main effects of social network size and educational attainment upon arrival were positive, indicating the contribution of human capital and social capital to class mobility or the prevention of downward mobility. These findings are supportive of resource theory as an explanation for upward mobility. Additionally, migrants who had been part of the working class or the petty ownership class before migration were significantly more likely to sustain immobility as compared with

TABLE 2

MARGINAL EFFECTS (PERCENTAGE INCREASED AT THE AVERAGE LEVEL) ON CLASS MOBILITY (N = 629)

Predictor	Upward mobility versus downward mobility	No mobility versus downward mobility
Main effect		
Social class before arrival in Hong Kong (every 100%)		
Not in employment	129.8	162.4
Working class (manual)	55.7	14.9*
Middle class (routine non-manual, clerical)	52.2	5.3
Upper middle class (professional, managerial)	−5.2	−5.1
Petty ownership class (self-employed)	4.0	17.3*
Ownership class (employer)	–	–
Duration of residence in Hong Kong (every 10 years)	6.3**	1.6
Female (every 100%)	−6.2**	−13.8***
Coming from Guangdong Province (every 100%)	7.2*	7.6*
Coming from Fujian Province (every 100%)	7.5	7.4
Age at arrival at Hong Kong (every 10 years)	0.5	0.8
Grade before arrival in Hong Kong (every 10 years)	7.9**	5.6
Grade increase after arrival (every 10 years)	4.5	−7.6
Schooling since arrival (every 10 years)	0.9	8.3
Work experience before arrival (every 10 years)	−1.3	−0.6
Having a disability or chronic illness before arrival	−2.0	3.1
Fluency in Cantonese before arrival (every 100)	−1.4	−4.6
Increase in fluency in Cantonese since arrival (every 100)	0.9	−2.3
Social network at arrival in Hong Kong (every 1 SD)	3.1**	3.5*
Pseudo-R^2 ($L^2(36) = 412.647$, $p < .001$)	.455	
Additional interaction effect (every 1 SD)		
Age at arrival × Grade increase since arrival	−12.7*	−11.6
Age at arrival × Schooling since arrival	−15.3*	−25.1*
Social network at arrival × Grade increase since arrival	16.6*	34.7*
Social network at arrival × Schooling since arrival	1.7	2.9
Pseudo-R^2 ($L^2(44) = 443.398$, $p < .001$)	.489	
Pseudo-ΔR^2 ($\Delta L^2(8) = 30.751$, $p < .001$)	.034	

The reference categories were as follows: male, a member of the ownership class before migration, and from a place of origin other than Guangdong Province or Fujian Province.

Although the apparent marginal effect due to a change from employment to not being employed was over 100%, the possible marginal effect was weaker because the change must cause a decrease in employment, which weakened the marginal effect.

*, $p < .05$; **, $p < .01$; ***, $p < .001$.

downward mobility. In contrast, those who had been in the ownership class before migration were more likely than other migrants to be at risk of downward mobility.

The significant interaction effects on both upward mobility and immobility, as opposed to downward mobility, were those interactions between age upon arrival and increased schooling and further education since arrival (see Table 2). Furthermore, the interaction between age upon arrival and increase in education since arrival revealed a significant negative effect on upward mobility. These effects were consistent with Hypotheses 1.1, 1.2 and 2.1. Accordingly, an increase in schooling and/or further education contributed more to the younger migrant's upward mobility, and social network size enhanced this contribution. For instance, a 10-year increase in the grade of a migrant who was 1 year younger was 3.6 percentage points higher with regard to the chance of upward mobility, given the original chance of mobility at the average level. When there was an increase of one standard deviation in the interaction between young age and grade increase, the increase with regard to the chance of upward mobility was 12.7 percentage points. Similarly, an increase in the interaction between young age and schooling since arrival engendered an increase in the chance of upward mobility by 15.3 percentage points. An increase in the interaction between the social network upon arrival and grade increase since arrival would lead to an increase in the chance of upward mobility by 16.6 percentage points. Similar results transpired with regard to the chance of immobility. These statistically significant interaction effects appeared to be substantial. However, there was no support for Hypothesis 2.2, about the interaction effect between schooling and social network size.

The preceding results of the hypothesis testing were sustainable in the analysis of data from migrants who were in employment before arrival in Hong Kong. Accordingly, Hypotheses 1.1, 1.2 and 2.1 were supported as before. The younger migrant thereby had a lower chance of downward mobility as a result of schooling or a grade increase after arrival (see Table 3). An increase in the interaction between young age and schooling since arrival by one standard deviation would reduce the chance of downward mobility by 40.4 percentage points, evaluated at the average level of mobility. Another significant finding was that schooling after arrival prevented downward mobility to a greater extent for a migrant with a larger social network upon arrival. An increase of one standard deviation in the interaction between social network and grade increase would reduce the chance of downward mobility by 68.8 percentage points. These effects held with the control for background characteristics, among which gender, the home region and class before migration were significant predictors. All of these findings concurred with those for predicting immobility versus downward mobility. However, it was not feasible to estimate the effects on upward mobility, because only a few cases of upward mobility were available.

DISCUSSION

The mainland Chinese migrant in Hong Kong was most likely (58.5%) to have no class mobility. Conversely, 29.3 per cent of the migrants moved downwards and 12.2 per cent moved upwards in class. In particular, 22.6 per cent of those migrants who had not been in employment before migration experienced upward mobility. This upward mobility may reflect the opportunity, as well as the need, to enter employment in Hong Kong, because of the emphasis on economic activity and self-sufficiency in the host society (Chan, 2006). This finding suggests that both mobility and immobility were likely following migration to Hong Kong. As such, Hong Kong provides opportunities for both maintenance and change. It allows some migrants to maintain their class status and others to move either up or down. Moreover, upward and downward mobility were equally likely, or at least there was no significant difference in their probability. This finding shows that class mobility following migration to Hong Kong is not necessarily upward or downward. This uncertainty in class mobility essentially calls for explanation and prediction.

TABLE 3

MARGINAL EFFECTS (PERCENTAGE INCREASED AT THE AVERAGE LEVEL) ON THE EMPLOYED MIGRANT'S CLASS MOBILITY (N = 311)

Predictor	No mobility versus downward mobility
Main effect	
Social class before arrival in Hong Kong (every 100%)	
Working class (manual)	29.8*
Middle class (routine non-manual, clerical)	10.7
Upper middle class (professional, managerial)	−9.7
Petty ownership class (self-employed)	34.2*
Ownership class (employer)	–
Duration of residence in Hong Kong (every 10 years)	2.6
Female (every 100%)	−27.5***
Coming from Guangdong Province (every 100%)	15.4*
Coming from Fujian Province (every 100%)	15.5
Age at arrival in Hong Kong (every 10 years)	1.1
Grade before arrival in Hong Kong (every 10 years)	10.8
Grade increase after arrival (every 10 years)	−15.2
Schooling since arrival (every 10 years)	16.3
Work experience before arrival (every 10 years)	−1.3
Having a disability or chronic illness before arrival	6.4
Fluency in Cantonese before arrival (every 100)	−9.1
Increase in fluency in Cantonese since arrival (every 100)	−4.3
Social network at arrival in Hong Kong (every 1 SD)	6.4
Pseudo-R^2 ($L^2(34) = 236.271$, $p < .001$)	.330
Additional interaction effect (every 1 SD)	
Age at arrival × Grade increase since arrival	−26.8*
Age at arrival × Schooling since arrival	−40.4*
Social network at arrival × Grade increase since arrival	68.8*
Social network at arrival × Schooling since arrival	4.5
Pseudo-R^2 ($L^2(42) = 216.896$, $p < .001$)	.385
Pseudo-ΔR^2 ($\Delta L^2(8) = 30.751$, $p < .001$)	.055

The reference categories were as follows: male, a member of the ownership class before migration, and from a place of origin other than Guangdong Province or Fujian Province.
Estimation for upward mobility was not feasible because only five such cases were available.
*, $p < .05$; **, $p < .01$; ***, $p < .001$.

Uncertainty about class mobility became less of a problem when some resources and conditions were significantly predictive of class mobility. Consistent with resource theory, education before migration and social network size upon migration were resources that, in particular, facilitated the mainland migrant's upward mobility in Hong Kong. These findings illustrate the importance of human and social capital. However, education after migration did not show a contribution to class mobility, contrary to some other studies (Akresh, 2006; Rooth and Ekberg, 2006). In contrast, education since migration appeared to interact with young age and social network size to facilitate

upward mobility. Accordingly, the contribution of education since migration was conditional on young age and social network size.

The unconditional main contribution of education before migration to upward mobility is consistent with existing findings (Akresh, 2006). Such a contribution may reflect a structural fit to Hong Kong. In this connection, education before migration tends to be different from education in Hong Kong, therefore offering migrants a unique asset in their attempts to fit into the integrated functioning of Hong Kong. For instance, education on the Chinese mainland may emphasize the learning of the Chinese language and moral and physical development (Zhang, 2003), which may be complementary to the talents available in Hong Kong. According to structural fit theory, this complementary fit would favour the upward mobility of the educated migrant. Conversely, education after migration may not give the migrant an edge over the native Hong Kong population.

Education after migration to Hong Kong only facilitated the migrant's upward mobility when the migrant had been young during migration and had a larger social network upon arrival. Accordingly, young age and social network size contributed to the benefit of education after migration. These findings are consonant with structural fit theory, which predicts that schooling and social support are normative and functional to younger people and their home–school cooperation. In the case of Hong Kong, the fit is likely to facilitate upward mobility as opposed to downward mobility when the young migrant attends evening schools or enrols in alternative educational programmes to upgrade his or her educational qualifications. Such a qualification upgrade is reasonably germane to career development in Hong Kong (Lim, 2008). Normatively, children study in school, while receiving support from their families (Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003). Migrants who are older and receive less social support would be less likely to excel in school, in view of the negative effect of age and the positive effect of social support on the immigrant's school achievement found in other studies (Voydanoff, 2004). This is because the over-age person who lacks family support would be a poor fit to the educational system (Domina, 2005). For instance, the family can provide financial support to help the younger immigrant to excel in or fit into education in the host society (Weinberg, 2001). Meanwhile, the fit with education enables upward mobility, as mobility requires educational achievement or excellence (Elliott et al., 2001).

Unlike education and social network size, work experience, chronic illness or disability, and proficiency in Cantonese did not significantly affect the mainland migrant's upward mobility. According to structural fit theory, these resources may not fit the Hong Kong way of life. For instance, work experience before migration may not be relevant to work in Hong Kong, probably because of discrepancies in the work system between Hong Kong and the mainland, such as the levels of post-industrialisation, job security, and the requirements for worker competitiveness and quality performance (Cheung, 2005; Chiu and Lui, 2004). Accordingly, work on the mainland is less competitive and less skilled, while workers receive more benefits and protection from their work organisations (Lin and Lai, 1995; Xiang and Li, 2001). Workers on the mainland also have a habit of sleeping after lunch, within working hours, and this habit clearly deviates from Hong Kong's brisk work ethic. Additionally, chronic illness and disability did not impair the migrant's upward mobility, because of the protection of, and assistance offered to, workers with illnesses and disabilities in Hong Kong. Notably, laws to ensure equal opportunity and prevent discrimination at work prevail in Hong Kong, and may be effective in protecting workers (Gunderson, 1989). The social services in Hong Kong also tend to encourage and assist the work of people with illnesses and disabilities, thus promoting their involvement with work (Li, 1998). Contrary to expectations, fluency in Cantonese was not a determinant of upward mobility, probably because native Hong Kong people can understand and tolerate relatively poor Cantonese. This stems from the fact that the Hong Kong natives and the migrants share the same Chinese language, even though Cantonese is somewhat different from other Chinese dialects. Importantly, Hong Kong natives and migrants have no problems communicating using written Chinese.

Further research

Further research, using rigourous approaches to research design, sampling and measurement, would strengthen or verify the present findings. A preferable design would need to be a longitudinal one, employing prospective or at least cohort-sequential data collection. A prospective design in which the same panel was studied over time would be ideal, to ensure data quality and analytical validity in causal inference. Such inference requires the examination of prior causes, such as resources, on subsequent outcomes, such as class mobility. If it was difficult to secure a panel for repetitive examination, the study of different cohorts over time would be a second-best alternative. In this case, the cohorts would not be the same panel, studied repetitively. However, investigating different cohorts sequentially could differentiate the period from the cohort or age effect. The design would thereby clarify how the time of migration affected the class mobility of migrants from different cohorts or of differing ages. Apart from the design, a rigourous sampling procedure would be necessary to ensure the suitability of the sample for statistical inference. This would require either a comprehensive sampling list of mainland migrants or a large-scale survey approach to identify a subsample of mainland migrants. Furthermore, rigourous measurement would involve sophisticated tools for measuring resources and class mobility, such as those used to assess work skills and language proficiency. Informants other than the migrants, including family members and employers or superiors, might also help the assessment and its validation.

To consolidate the application of structural fit theory to explanations for the contribution of resources to migrants' class mobility, further research is needed to demonstrate the theoretical mechanism. This demonstration necessarily requires identification of the structural fit between resource use and the host society or its subsystems. Regarding the hypothesized interaction effects, further research is obviously needed to assess the fit of education to young migrants, their families and social networks, and the host society. In this connection, the fit refers to fulfilment of the need to survive or function, or to enhancement of the functioning of the social system. A clue to revealing the fit is the relevant social norm, such as assigning young people to schools, and mobilizing support from families and other social networks. The rigourous demonstration of such a moderating effect of the structural fit preferably depends on an examination across structures or cultures. Accordingly, different structures and cultures have different norms or patterns of structural fit, and this difference broadens the database for scrutinizing the effect of the fit. Furthermore, a cross-cultural study would facilitate generalisation of the findings or the identification of cultural differentials. In order to develop more knowledge, further research is needed to determine the influences of cultural–contextual factors on the explanation for class mobility. Moreover, further research could demonstrate how the contribution of structural fit is mediated through educational achievement.

Implications

In general, facilitating migrants' upward mobility and contribution to the host society represents an integrated goal consonant with structural fit theory. According to the theory, class mobility and contribution to society are interdependent, such that conditions that fit the society would also facilitate upward mobility. The preparation of such conditions would provide a means of raising the migrant's upward mobility and vice versa. This preparation would need to focus on factors such as the migrant's education before and after migration, age at migration and social network after migration. To facilitate the migrant's upward mobility, it is crucial to enhance the fit of these factors to the host society or its subsystems. Such an enhancement includes making pre-migration education complementary to that in the host society, providing schooling to young migrants and mobilizing social support for migrants' schooling in the host society. Given that the functions of the school and social network are interdependent (Brown, 2001), promoting the dual development of schooling and social networking would be

particularly beneficial to the migrant's upward mobility. Conversely, resources such as work experience and language use before migration require positive efforts to make them compatible with the host society, such as the provision of training, familiarisation visits and other opportunities to prepare aspiring migrants for integration with the host society after migration (Akresh, 2006; Scott et al., 1989).

Specifically, as upward mobility is not the dominant option for migrants in Hong Kong, it deserves promotion. Moreover, it is necessary to prevent migrants' downward mobility, which is just as likely as upward mobility in Hong Kong. This essentially requires increasing the compatibility of mainland qualifications with those of Hong Kong. Conceivably, further modernisation on the mainland, involving the upgrading of education and training (Li, 2001), would bridge the qualification gap between the mainland and Hong Kong. For instance, mainland education has been placing an increasing emphasis on teaching students about the use of English (Hu, 2005). This could help to improve the fit of young educated migrants to the Hong Kong work environment, because the use of English is indispensable in many prestigious work settings in Hong Kong (Choi, 2003). Additionally, after taking resources and other factors into account, female migrants are disadvantaged by underemployment and alienation, which limits their upward mobility. It is therefore imperative to improve the way in which female migrants fit into the labour market in Hong Kong.

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