Social Class and Cross-Border Higher Education: Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong and Macau

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In China’s deepening economic reform, higher education plays a crucial role in social stratification and mobility. External higher education is both a symbol of cultural capital and a means of fulfilling social mobility. This article examines the relationship between students’ socioeconomic backgrounds and the opportunities derived from cross-border higher education, focusing on Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. It shows that students with scholarships come from a range of social backgrounds, but that fee-paying students are only from relatively prosperous families. Higher education in Hong Kong and Macau promotes mobility for some, but preserves social stratification for others.

Alors que la réforme économique s’intensifie en Chine, les études supérieures jouent un rôle crucial dans la stratification et la mobilité sociales. L’Éducation supérieure obtenue à l’étranger constitue un symbole de capital culturel ainsi qu’un moyen d’acquérir la mobilité sociale. Cet article étudie, chez un groupe d’étudiants de la Chine continentale à Hong Kong et à Macau, le rapport entre leur milieu socio-économique et les occasions qui découlent d’une éducation supérieure internationale. Les résultats indiquent que les étudiants ayant reçu des bourses proviennent de divers milieux sociaux, mais que ceux qui ne sont pas boursiers viennent exclusivement de familles relativement aisées. À Hong Kong et à Macau, l’éducation supérieure facilite la mobilité pour certains; pour d’autres, elle maintient la stratification sociale.

Key words/Mots-clés: Cross-border higher education/Études supérieures transnationales; Hong Kong; Macau; Social mobility/Mobilité sociale; Social stratification/Stratification sociale.
Introduction

Relationships between parents’ socioeconomic status and students’ educational participation and attainments have been studied extensively (Bourdieu, 1997; Reay, David, & Hall, 2005; Scott, 1996; Vogt, 1997; Xie & Cao, 2005). Sociologists observe that parents’ capital in economic, cultural, and social forms can be inherited and transmitted to their offspring through education. Therefore, education has a dual role as a symbol of cultural capital in itself and as a tool of stratification and mobility. Education reproduces social class structures and distributes social resources. The privileged classes take advantage of opportunities to gain education and to secure the advantage of education by using earned and inherited capital, habits, and privilege. By contrast, lower classes are disadvantaged in the participation, process, and attainment due to education (Reay et al., 2005).

Many societies show a correlation between social class and university attainment that is affected by educational policies that grant differential rates of subsidies. Educational subsidies are expected to narrow class differences, whereas private financing either maintains or increases these gaps. The children of various social classes follow distinct pathways to gain higher education that lead to varying occupations and incomes following graduation. In some settings, education reflects and strengthens rather than reduces social stratification and polarization. For this to occur, elite students must perform well academically while their families face the challenges of high tuition and private educational costs. Scholars use human capital theory to explain the persistence of an uneven distribution of higher education among various social classes (Bourdieu, 1997; Lareau, 2001), which is evident not only in domestic higher educational settings, but perhaps even more strongly in their access to higher education abroad.

Mainland China is experiencing dramatic social change with its socioeconomic reform linked to privatization and marketization. The stratification and reproduction of varying social classes has changed with the transition from a socialist planned economy to a market economy, and higher education in general and external higher education in particular have played a major role.

This article examines whether students’ socioeconomic background (parental occupations and education) and their family resources affect their desire to obtain higher education and ensure their access to cross-border higher education. It assesses whether students’ fees and scholarships affect social mobility of Mainland students in Hong Kong’s and Macau’s higher education systems. Based on questionnaires and inter-
views with Mainland Chinese students in four universities in Hong Kong and Macau, it evaluates the role that fee-paying mechanisms in Hong Kong and Macau play in the recruitment of children from cadre and business families compared with the children of working-class families.

Concepts: Cultural Capital and Positional Competition

*Capital Theory*
Bourdieu's (1997) capital theory helps to explain the distribution of resources among social groups and the conversion of forms of inter- and intra-generational capital. Bourdieu suggests that capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital is convertible into money and may be institutionalized in property rights. Cultural capital is converted into economic capital and may be institutionalized in educational qualifications. Social capital, made up of social obligations (connections), in certain conditions becomes economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of titles denoting social rank. Parental capital in any form may be inherited and conferred on children.

A fourth type, political or organizational capital (power), is formed through the occupation of political positions in government agencies and is dominated by members in high social strata such as party cadres, government officials, and high- and middle-level civil servants. Its role is significant in China (Lu, 2002, 2004).

When these four forms of capital are combined, they determine social stratification and mobility. The four forms of capital are to some extent interchangeable and can be transferred across categories both within and across generations. For example, parents' economic capital can be transformed into their children's cultural capital through fee-paying higher education and scholarship-earning external higher education.

Parkin (1979) argued, “in modern capitalist society the two main exclusionary devices by which the bourgeoisie constructs and maintains itself as a class are, first, those surrounding the institutions of property; and second, academic or professional qualifications and credentials” (pp. 47–48). Conley (2001) added that these two “exclusionary devices” are not independent of each other, because parents may use wealth to finance their children’s educational and professional credentials, solidifying their class position on the human capital dimension. These concepts are also relevant to this present study.
Credentials, Positional Goods, and Status Competition
Status competition theorists such as Collins (1979) suggested that education functions as a kind of cultural currency that enables those who hold it to purchase certain kinds of occupation and status. Marginson (2004) identified higher education credentials as "positioned goods" (which determine social position) over which student-consumers struggle in status-competition markets.

The positional goods theory advocated by Marginson (2004) suggests that students pursue the comparative advantage and positional value of various forms of higher education, which generates differentiated demand. Transnational markets are especially important when domestic opportunities for upward mobility are constrained. However, even where the number of tertiary places of quality meet domestic demand, as in Korea and Japan, there may be strong positional demand for a foreign education as a status good.

Some aspiring yet wealthy Mainland students have a range of choices in both internal and external markets. Because the demand for higher education in China is greater than the supply, many students secure places overseas. Others enter external markets although they can secure places in the country because they value the courses and associated benefits. These students see non-local study as prestigious and know that external programs offer better study conditions, resources, and professional opportunities that are not available at home.

The supply may also be either substitutive or differentiated. Substitutive supply means that foreign universities compensate for an insufficient supply of higher education in the domestic market. Differentiated supply means that universities offer quality courses in specializations that are not available in the internal market.

Contexts: Cultural Tradition, Social Mobility, and Unmet Demand for Higher Education

Cultural Tradition and the Value of Higher Education
China's 4,000-year-old Confucian ideology emphasizes social hierarchy, where every individual and group is embedded in a social network determined by status at birth and performance in a merit way. These values remain significant today, allowing an individual's successes to affect the family or the collective unit. Parents sometimes push children to pursue high social status regardless of their ability and the family's re-
sources. In China, as elsewhere, pursuing high social status through education is an important and reliable tool. Thus Chinese families heavily invest both money and effort in their children’s education. In the past, a key way for a Chinese individual or family to upgrade social status was through successfully completing the imperial civil service examination. In contemporary society, higher education functions like the civil service exam.

In traditional Chinese society, farming, manual work, and business were humble occupations, whereas officials and scholars were highly respected. The hierarchy for these occupations still resonates. However, because of reforms launched in the late 1970s, businessmen have secured higher social status than peasants and workers, because they own economic capital, which can be transferred into and exchanged with other forms of capital such as culture and power. New professionals, such as physicians, lawyers, teachers, engineers, managers, and accountants have also risen in the hierarchy (Lu, 2004). Thus in modern society, not only officials and scholars belong to upper and/or middle classes, but also businessmen and professionals. Self-funded higher education opens the door for business families to transfer their own economic and political capital to their children, which affords entry into both preferred occupations and the middle or upper social classes as well. Thus Chinese people pursue external higher education not only for economic returns, but for social status, two benefits that are usually connected.

Social Class Mobility and Capital Intergenerational Conversion
Social mobility includes vertical (upward and downward) mobility and horizontal mobility of individuals or groups. Vogt (1997) argued that social stratification defines how a society structures the unequal distribution of goods among the persons and groups that constitute that society. Many categories of goods are unequally distributed in any society. Education is not only a good, but also one of the means by which other goods may be unequally allocated. Acquisition of education in China’s domestic institutions or in cross-border schools enhances this role of education. Following the reform and open-door policy, China has experienced change in socioeconomic sectors with the shift from a centrally planned to a market economy, and from agricultural to industrial and service economies. These changes have in turn caused fundamental changes in a person’s position in a social class. Before the late 1970s, social class was determined mainly by inborn elements such as family identity together with subjective political awareness and attitudes. Since the reform and the open-door policy,
social class has been determined basically according to occupation, educational credentials, capital, and income.

Significant changes in social class structure have taken place since the early 1950s. The general tendency has been a decline in the proportion of lower and working classes, and a rise of those in upper and middle classes. An important study (Li & Chen, 2004) found that in 2001, there were 10 main social strata in contemporary China. Among them, officials/administrators, managers, and private owners belonged to the upper class (4.7%); professionals, technicians, and small businessmen to the middle class (18.9%); and employees in the service sector, workers, peasants, and unemployed to the lower class (76.4%). The upper and middle classes (23.6%) could afford education, but the lower class faced unprecedented pressure to pay for schooling and higher education.

In general, three types of capital determine the possibility of upward social mobility: political, economic, and cultural. Party cadres and government officials dominate the ownership of political capital; senior managers, entrepreneurs, and businessmen possess economic capital; and highly educated people have cultural capital. These three kinds of capital, as noted, may be transformed and overlap. For example, officials can secure economic and cultural capital through their political capital (position and power). Private entrepreneurs and businessmen can pay for their own and their children's higher education through fees; and highly educated people can be promoted as high officials or employed as managers, thus also owning power and economic capital. The realization of upward mobility of the middle and lower classes can be achieved only through accumulation of economic and/or cultural capital. In this sense, scholarship and fee-paying higher education play a critical role in creating opportunities for upward social mobility.

Unmet Demand for Higher Education
With 1.3 billion people, China is the most populated country in the world. The huge cohort of university-aged people has fuelled demand for higher education. In recent decades, China has experienced substantial economic development, which has raised aspirations for higher education. In response, institutions of higher education have expanded markedly, but not enough to meet the demand. The enrolment rate for the age cohort of 18–22 years increased from 3.4% in 1990 to 17% in 2004 (Chen, 2004; People's Republic of China [PRC], 2003). However, because of the population size, the absolute number of students who could not enter higher education remained huge. In 2002, about 41.7% of graduates from ju-
nior secondary schools and 16.5% from general senior secondary schools could not obtain places in higher education (PRC, 2003).

Although some students who could not secure university entrance accepted their fate, others sought ways to overcome this obstacle. Some repeated one or more years to retake the national university entry examinations, and others sought places outside Mainland China including in Hong Kong and Macau. Some students who went outside gained scholarships from the host countries or institutions or from employers or national or provincial governments in China, whereas others financed themselves. Increasing numbers of wealthy families could easily afford the fees of external universities. Moreover, China's one-child policy permitted a concentration of resources. The one-child policy was initiated in 1979, and by the beginning of the 21st century, the cohort of university-aged students was formed mainly of the only children in their families. Between 1978 and 2004, 814,900 Mainland Chinese travelled abroad to study (PRC, 2006). In 2004, 114,700 Chinese students went abroad for higher education, 90.9% of who were paying fees (PRC, 2006). After the mid-1990s, China was one of the largest sources of foreign students in the United States, and it was also a major supplier of students in the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Canada, and elsewhere. Mainland Chinese students accounted for 88.7% of non-local students in Hong Kong in 2003 (Li, 2006).

Means of Financing Cross-Border Higher Education: Fees and Scholarships

Mainland Chinese students pursue external higher education through various financial sources, particularly scholarships and fee-paying. Scholarships are granted by various sponsors, including host governments and institutions, home governments and institutions, international organizations, foundations, and private donors. Fee-paying means that some or all of the cost is covered by the students and/or their families; the rest can be covered by scholarships awarded to the student or government subsidies to the institution. Scholarships awarded to students are for their private costs, fees, books, and accommodation.

These two means of financing play different roles in Chinese social stratification and mobility. Scholarships can enhance the mobility of all social classes as they are usually based on the academic performance of students rather than their social origin. Thus scholarships can outweigh the inherent advantages of middle-class children given their inherited cultural capital. Fee-paying policies, by contrast, tend to strengthen social stratification, especially when the fees are high. Fee-paying external higher education increases social stratification by enhancing the social status of
middle classes and excluding the working class. Thus the privatization of higher education in the absence of government subsidies, grants, and loans strengthens social stratification and may cause social polarization.

Since 1997, China has adopted a cost-recovery policy for all tertiary institutions, and tuition fees have dramatically increased. Under these conditions, family background including parents' education and financial resources influence the demand for private higher education. Higher-income families are naturally more willing to pay than lower income families.

Social stratification is especially obvious in Chinese students' cross-border higher education because tuition fees are higher abroad than at home. In 2004, the average yearly tuition fee of regular higher institutions in Mainland China was 6,106 yuan (US $738), and that of the top 100 institutions was 5,066 yuan (US $612, Li, 2006). In contrast, the annual tuition fee charged by the University of Hong Kong was 70,000 yuan (US $8,458) for fee-paying Mainland undergraduates in 2005-2006; and in the Macau University of Science and Technology, it was 42,000 yuan (US $5,075).

Because Hong Kong and Macau are part of China but differ from the Mainland, they can be considered halfway between domestic and foreign enclaves. In the context of students' international mobility, they play a dual role as destinations in themselves and as stepping-stones for travelling to international destinations.

Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong and Macau

In order to examine the relationship between the students' family backgrounds and their cross-border higher educational opportunities, in 2003 we administered questionnaire surveys and interviews of Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. In each territory, the oldest publicly funded institution was chosen, that is, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and the University of Macau (UM). The other two institutions surveyed were the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST). However, whereas HKUST is publicly funded, MUST is private. In the survey, 385 questionnaires were distributed, and 316 were collected with valid data, forming a response rate of 82.1%. The research sample was stratified through four main variables: sex, subject, degree levels, and financial source of total enrolment of Mainland students in each institution (see Table 1). A snowball technique was adopted to find respondents. At the time of the investigation, most Mainland students at HKU and HKUST were research postgraduates who held scholarships, whereas most Main-
### Table 1

**Characteristics of the Sample of Mainland Chinese Students in HKU, HKUST, UM and MUST (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong (N = 172)</th>
<th>Macau (N = 144)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male 58.2</td>
<td>Male 41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 41.8</td>
<td>Female 58.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree level</strong></td>
<td>Doctorate 70.6</td>
<td>Doctorate 0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master 15.3</td>
<td>Master 7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor 13.0</td>
<td>Bachelor 89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others 1.2</td>
<td>Others 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial source</strong></td>
<td>Fee-paying 2.3</td>
<td>Fee-paying 90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarship 97.7</td>
<td>Scholarship 9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family background#</strong></td>
<td>Cadre 19.7</td>
<td>Cadre 37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional 38.2</td>
<td>Professional 25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Businessman 0.6</td>
<td>Businessman 16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worker 30.6</td>
<td>Worker 11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peasant 10.4</td>
<td>Peasant 8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*<em>Academic background</em></td>
<td>National key school 83.0</td>
<td>National key school 14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial key school 11.4</td>
<td>Provincial key school 67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District key school 1.1</td>
<td>District key school 9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ordinary school 4.0</td>
<td>Ordinary school 8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental educational attainment</strong></td>
<td>Primary 6.4</td>
<td>Primary 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary 30.1</td>
<td>Secondary 24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate Degree 17.3</td>
<td>Associate Degree 21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor and above 45.7</td>
<td>Bachelor and above 51.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: # Students' family background was measured by father or mother's occupation. Most students identified their family background according to the parent who had the higher status occupation, usually the father.

*Academic background was measured by the types of institutions from which students had graduated. National key, provincial key, and district key institutions refer to the particular institutions ranking in the order of national, provincial and district levels.
land students in UM and MUST were fee-paying undergraduates. In 2003–2004, 122 and 148 Mainland undergraduates and 394 and 461 research postgraduates were enrolled in HKUST and HKU (Li, 2006). Due to limited capability to recruit postgraduates and few scholarships offered to Mainland students, the mainstream Mainland students in UM and MUST were self-financed undergraduate students. Thus the major findings in this research could result from Macau’s fee-paying undergraduates in comparison with Hong Kong’s scholarship postgraduates. In addition to questionnaires, 28 interviews were conducted with broadly representative participants to seek in-depth information.

Family Features and Financial Sources
In the total sample of 316 students, large percentages came from professional (32.6%) and cadre families (28.2%). In addition, 22.0% came from working-class families, 9.4% from peasant families, and 7.9% from business families.

The findings from the sample of 126 full-fee-paying students illustrate that social classes were more unevenly distributed than in the scholarship sample (see Table 2). In the fee-paying cases, the proportion of children whose parents were farmers and workers was only 16.7%, whereas the children of cadre, businessmen, and professionals constituted 83.3% of those paying fees. In contrast, in the scholarship sample, 41.0% were from farmer and worker families, and 59% were from cadre, business, and professional families. The figures in Table 2 show that fee-paying and scholarships provide two mechanisms to obtain external higher education and realize upward social mobility. The socioeconomically advantaged groups such as cadres and professionals dominated the self-financed case. The distribution of social classes in the scholarship group was more even. The fee-paying policy acted as a filter that permitted the middle and upper classes to enter external educational institutions. The Chi-square test revealed a significant correlation between students’ parental occupations and financial source (fee-paying and scholarships) of their external higher education. In either case, the middle and upper social classes had an advantage over the lower classes in obtaining external education given their greater political, economic, cultural, and social capital. However, scholarships can be effective mechanisms for reducing the domination of upper classes because they offer opportunities and resources to lower classes.

Table 2 outlines the type of capital held by students from various social backgrounds. We report the percentage distributions by class and scholarship, fee-paying status. With regard to the representation of varying social
Table 2
Social Class, Capital, and Proportion of Mainland Chinese Students in HKU, HKUST, UM and MUST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>% in scholarships sample (A) Number = 190</th>
<th>% in fee-paying sample (B) Number = 126</th>
<th>% in total sample Number = 316</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadre</td>
<td>Most political, and some cultural, economic, social</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Most cultural; some social economic and political</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Most economic; some social, cultural and political</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>Disadvantaged; less social, cultural, economic, and least political</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant</td>
<td>Most disadvantaged; least social, cultural, economic and political</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. According to the Chi-square test, there was significant correlation between student's parental occupations and financial source (fee-paying and scholarships) of their external higher education, with $X^2 = 58.125, p < .001, df = 4.$

classes in external higher education in Hong Kong and Macau, it was striking that cadre and professional dominated, and that worker and peasant classes were underrepresented. The picture of representation among fee-paying students was especially extreme. This uneven distribution is determined by distinctiveness of capital owned by varying social strata.

Parental Occupation and Educational Attainment
Parental occupation and educational attainment have a significant effect on students' educational aspirations and access. Table 3 reports dramatic differences in parental educational attainments in varying social classes for Mainland students in Hong Kong and Macau. Cadre and professional families had the greatest educational attainments, followed by business, worker, and peasant families. The Chi-square test indicated a significant correlation between parental occupations and educational attainments.
Table 3
Mainland Students' Parental Occupations and Educational Attainments (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic origin</th>
<th>Master degree</th>
<th>Bachelor degree</th>
<th>Associate degree</th>
<th>Senior high school</th>
<th>Junior high school</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadre</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Parental educational attainments are measured by father or mother’s educational attainments. Most students identified their parental educational attainments according to the parent who had the higher education qualification, usually the father.

\( p < .001 \). For example, most students whose parents held bachelors’ or higher degrees were from cadre and professional families. In contrast, those whose parents had only secondary or primary education were mostly from working-class families, including workers and peasants. If educational attainments symbolize cultural capital, this pattern of respondents implies that cadre and professional families had much more cultural capital than working-class families. The business and worker families had less cultural capital than cadre and professional families, but greater capital than peasants’ households.

Comparison of Hong Kong and Macau
Compared with Macau, Hong Kong’s higher education sector was more competitive, had a longer history, more government financial support, and larger numbers of quality Mainland students. Hong Kong had focused on quality students, particularly research graduates, whereas Macau had targeted average undergraduates. A high proportion of Mainland students were postgraduates who contributed to the research force of institutions and justified the Hong Kong government’s financial support. The Macau government actively encouraged both public and private institutions to attract students from Mainland China both to generate income and to broaden the scope of the higher education sector. Macau did not have a strong tradition of sponsorship of Mainland students. As a result, the characteristics of the Mainland student bodies in the two Special Administrative Regions differed in degree level, academic background, age, and financing.
In the sample, 97.7% of Mainland students in Hong Kong held scholarships, 85.9% being research postgraduates; and 90.4% in Macau were full-fee-paying students, 89.7% of whom were undergraduates. Furthermore, institutions in Hong Kong selected students according to academic performance rather than socioeconomic status. This produced differences in the distribution of socioeconomic status between the Hong Kong and Macau samples. Mainland students in Hong Kong came predominantly from professional (38.2%), worker (30.6%), and cadre (19.7%) families, with only 10.4% from peasant families and only 0.6% from business families. In Macau, students came mainly from cadre (37.9%), professional (25.5%), and business (16.6%) families, with only 11.7% from worker and 8.3% from peasant families (see Table 1). Thus the proportions of children from cadre and businessman families were much greater in Macau than in Hong Kong. Obviously, more students in Hong Kong came from professional, worker, and peasant families.

It seems that parents' political capital (for cadre families) and economic capital (for business families) was transferable to external education for the next generation of fee-paying students in Macau, but this phenomenon is less obvious in Hong Kong. Hong Kong students depended more on their parents' knowledge capital and their own academic performance to gain entry to schools. This was evident from the fact that 38.2% of respondents were from families where the fathers or mothers were professionals, and 41.0% were from worker and peasant families. It seems that in Macau, the parent generation's political and financial capital increased the new generation's chance of accessing higher education through financial means.

Motivations for Study in Hong Kong and Macau
When asked for the four most important anticipated benefits from the degree being pursued, in Hong Kong, the responses were academic ability (69.0%), social and cultural experience (63.3%), economic return (51.7%), and competitive ability in the employment market (45.2%). In Macau, they were economic return (77.2%), competitive ability in the employment market (65.8%), social and cultural experience (51.0%), and academic ability (42.1%). Thus the Mainland students in Macau valued economic factors (economic return and competitive ability in the employment market) much more highly than their counterparts in Hong Kong; and the students in Hong Kong valued academic achievement much more than their counterparts in Macau. Both groups valued the social and cultural benefits of their degrees.

Many parents and students treated higher education as a mechanism for maintaining their upper-middle social class status or as a ladder for
climbing up from lower social status. This pattern was evident both in the groups that focused on academic factors, which were dominant in Hong Kong, and in the groups that focused on economic benefits, which were dominant in Macau. Students saw the qualifications that they would gain as passports to desired occupational and social status, and external higher education mobility was essentially an instrument for social class mobility. As one interviewee explained, "There are three purposes for university education. First, it enhances the quality of individuals; second, it is a ladder for increasing income and thereby social status; and third, it is a mini-society in which to be socialized" (MUST-Bachelor 2).

Many other interviewees also indicated that their pursuit of external higher education was motivated by goals not only of higher incomes, but of improved social status. Lower-class children wished to achieve upward mobility through their own efforts in educational attainment, whereas middle- and upper-class students sought high social status partly through their own efforts and partly through their parents' capital. Because they had financial resources, middle- and upper-class students were the main consumers of fee-paying higher education both overseas and in Hong Kong and Macau.

Students treated external higher education as a ladder for upward social mobility. Students with varying socioeconomic status pursued upward mobility through varying channels and means. As articulated by one undergraduate:

Students from farmer and worker families are thinking to move to cities through higher education. They work hard to get into good universities and then to secure high scores. They feel that their fate depends on their own efforts in education. In contrast, students from businessman and cadre families know that their parents will help them to find jobs. Their parents have much social and financial capital on which the children can rely. The children's fates are partially in the hands of their parents. They do not need to work hard. Some offspring of rich families play a lot, enjoying life. . . . Some children of rich families lose motivation of upward mobility. But some keep on moving upward on the base of parents' capital and social status (MUST-Bachelor 1).

The students believed that MUST was itself a mini-society that was segmented according to the students' socioeconomic status. One symbol of such social segmentation was that students from similar backgrounds grouped together. Another was that business and cadre offspring brought
the transaction modes of their parents, based on reciprocal interest and money. Children of middle- and upper-class families tended to feel comfortable with one another, and poor students stayed in other groups. The poor were more independent and studied harder. Students from rich families tended to spend money generously and to compete for material enjoyment. They were less likely to study hard, frequently went to entertainment places, and usually made friends according to money and interest.

Pursuit of high social status and upward mobility formed strong motivations for both scholarship and fee-paying undergraduates and postgraduates in Hong Kong and Macau. As noted by a doctoral student in HKUST, “The reason for me to come to study here is not only for making money in the future, but also for the social status. I believe some students are also going abroad to acquire social status.”

Discussion

Figure 1 shows the nature of the forces in operation. This figure explains that varying social classes hold differing amounts and forms of capital and
indicates how these forms of capital transfer within and across generations through fee-paying and scholarship status in external higher education. External higher education, particularly in elite institutions such as HKU and HKUST, generally leads to good occupations and high incomes in both the Mainland Chinese and external employment markets. This in turn further guarantees or solidifies the social status of cadres, professionals, and business people. In the Chinese context, cadre and professional social strata achieve upward mobility or maintain their social status by obtaining both fee-paying and scholarship cross-border higher education given their economic and cultural capital. Business families have relative advantages in using the fee-paying channel for educating their progeny, whereas workers and peasants are disadvantaged in terms of accessing both mechanisms to obtain cross-border higher education, especially that of fee-paying.

Conclusions

For individual students, external higher education can be treated as both a goal in itself and as a means of upward social mobility. In Chinese culture, higher education in general, and external higher education in particular, is a key instrument for enhancement of social status and social class mobility. In the case of Mainland Chinese students' pursuit of higher education in Hong Kong and Macau, two channels are evident: some students receive scholarships, and others pay full fees. The research reported here indicates that scholarship-holders were from a range of classes. In contrast, among the fee-paying students, the children of cadres, business people, and professionals dominated. This matches the theories of such scholars as Bourdieu (1997), Scott (1996), Vogt (1997), and Marginson (2004).

It is arguable along the lines of broader theories (Collins, 1979; Parkin, 1979) that the upper and middle classes predominantly secure opportunities for external higher education through the various forms of their capital, particularly political, economic, and cultural capital. Disadvantaged classes including workers and peasants were marginalized in higher education in Hong Kong and Macau because they lacked any form of capital. Among the upper and middle classes, varying social groups took advantage of differing forms of capital. Cadres predominantly possessed political and cultural capital, professionals had a great deal of cultural capital, and business people had adequate economic capital. Workers and
peasants had little capital except their own human resources. This is why peasants were the most marginalized social group in external higher education, particularly in fee-paying forms. These characteristics were to be expected in the data, but whereas most earlier studies focused on domestic access to education, our study focused on cross-border flows. It did so, moreover, within the distinctive case of China, which has historically had a different class structure from that of Western countries. China now has a vigorous market economy and operates in the framework of one country, two systems, with Mainland China on the one hand and Hong Kong and Macau on the other.

There are varying social stratification and mobility pathways through differing forms of capital (social, economic, cultural, and political), which can be converted within and between generations through the various mechanisms reported here. Scholarships do open the way for upward mobility for peasants and the working class, whereas upper and middle classes can find their own routes by paying fees. Although the particular circumstances of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau are distinctive, there is every reason to suggest that some elements of these basic patterns would also be found in other locations where cohorts of students undertake external studies.

References


