Is Hong Kong no longer a land of opportunities after the 1997 handover?: A comparison of patterns of social mobility between 1989 and 2007[1]

Yi-Lee Wong and Anita Koo

Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract

A belief that Hong Kong is a land of opportunities for the talented and the hardworking makes many speculate that an increasing involvement of younger generations in politics in recent years results from their blocked social mobility. What remains unclear is whether new generations are indeed deprived of mobility opportunities in nowadays Hong Kong. We seek to address this issue empirically by analysing two datasets collected in 1989 and 2007. Situating our discussion against the context of the study of social mobility, we discuss our analysis from two perspectives of social mobility: absolute mobility (mobility due to structural changes) and relative mobility (mobility due to changes in social fluidity). Against a changing class structure over the set period, structural opportunities for upward mobility are actually available to the younger generations; but, seemingly, whether they could grasp such opportunities to get ahead has become more strongly dependent on their class background.

Keywords:

class inequality, Hong Kong, Hong Kong dream, political development, social mobility, younger generations

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Introduction

Hong Kong, a former British colony, was considered as an economic miracle in the 20th Century—one of the four little dragons in Asia (Vogel, 1991). Indeed, the post-Second World War years have witnessed tremendous compacted changes in Hong Kong, being transformed from a fishing village in its early days, then into an industrialised city in the 1960s and 1970s, and now into a so-called cosmopolitan city with an information economy operating in a new form of capitalism (e.g., Gibson-Graham, 2006; Krinsky, 2008). Because of such a success, Hong Kong was believed to be a land of opportunity where any of the talented and hardworking could get ahead. But, seemingly, this belief has recently been challenged, especially after the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Yet, such a challenge is not an empirically grounded conclusion, but a speculation based on a number of observations in recent years about the youth's involvement in specific social movements. Regardless, the issue should be addressed is whether there are still opportunities for the youth nowadays to get ahead in Hong Kong.

In this article, we seek to take up this issue empirically. And, we situate our discussion against the context of the study of social mobility and substantiate our discussion with reference to an analysis of two mobility datasets collected in 1989 and 2007. In what follows, we shall first underscore the major findings from the literature of mobility studies and take advantage of their theoretical insights into understanding two different dimensions of social mobility rates—i.e., absolute mobility and relative mobility rates—to examine whether Hong Kong is still a land of opportunity for social mobility from two perspectives. The first is about the availability of opportunities for social mobility due to such structural changes as economic, social, political and/or historical development, captured by absolute mobility rates. The second is about the availability of such opportunities due to changes in social fluidity, captured by relative mobility rates. These two different understandings of opportunities for social mobility serve as a theoretical frame to make sense of the mobility data at hand. And then, we shall provide an overview of what has happened in contemporary Hong Kong as a backdrop for our discussion and discuss the datasets used in this paper. In comparing the two datasets, we shall focus on changes in the class structure of Hong Kong and changes in the distribution of opportunities for social mobility by class.

Theoretical insights from studies of social mobility

Social mobility has become one major sociological concern in understanding social changes. With the advent of industrialisation, it is observed that economic structure has been gradually dominated by the primary sector of production, then the secondary and tertiary sectors. This led many to argue that the social development of every industrial society followed a particular logic—i.e., the logic of industrialism—and to put forward that such structural development/changes would turn an industrial society into one of social openness whereby individuals did not necessarily remain in the same class, but could change their class position through their ability and effort, in that achievement would eventually supplant ascription in determining an individual's class/social position. Two implications for social mobility could be immediately drawn: first, more opportunities for social mobility would become available in industrial societies; and second, social mobility was not determined by an individual's class background, but rather their ability and effort. This then led mobility researchers to anticipate a greater level of intergenerational mobility in industrial societies and expect an independent relationship between an individual's class origin and class destination.

While it is reported for many industrial societies that mobility rates have increased, this increase does not automatically make such societies more socially open (e.g., Blau and Duncan, 1967; Hout, 1988, 1989; Marshall *et al.*, 1988; Luijkx and Ganzeboom, 1990; Warren and Hauser, 1997; Breen, 2000). These studies then cast doubt on the empirical validity of the logic of industrialism. In particular, in their seminal study, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) show that the social mobility of industrial societies in Western Europe over time is in constant flux but does not exhibit an increasing level of social fluidity. That is, although more opportunities for social mobility become available, class background still matters in influencing an individual's social or economic achievement. In analysing a 1989 mobility dataset, Chan (1994) also illustrated that Hong Kong exhibited more or less the same mobility patterns as those of its Western European counterparts. What is of particular importance here is Erikson and Goldthorpe's distinction of two types of social mobility: social mobility resulting from structural changes and social mobility due to the loosening dependence of class destinations on class origins. These two types of social mobility are respectively captured by absolute and relative mobility rates. Absolute mobility rates refer to the proportion of individuals from each class origin who are now in each class position; and,

relative mobility rates are measured in odds ratios referring to the *chances* of an individual of one class origin being found in one rather than another class destination being so many times greater or less than the corresponding chances of an individual of another class origin (Goldthorpe, 1987). While changes in absolute mobility rates in a given society usually reflect changes in its social class structure, changes in relative mobility rates indicate changes in its social openness/fluidity.

Nevertheless, this temporal invariance thesis of social mobility (relative mobility rates) is not immune to theoretical challenges and empirical scrutiny. Over these years, whether this thesis is true of all industrial societies or, more generally, whether social mobility of industrial societies exhibit a particular trend over time (and thus whether the logic of industrialism after all holds true) has been hotly debated (e.g., Wong, 1994). In fact, conflicting evidence against the thesis, as well as inconclusive findings have been encountered (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996; Breen, 2004; Jaeger and Holm, 2007). What is at issue is whether we could identify society-level characteristics as predictors for differences observed across industrial societies (Ganzeboom *et al*., 1989; Wong, 1990; Ganzeboom and Treiman, 2007). Despite their disagreements, mobility researchers are agreed that specific macro arrangements of some industrial societies, rather than an overarching logic of development—the logic of industrialism or the temporal invariance thesis—inevitably shared by all industrial societies, could explain the recent trends of increasing mobility (e.g., Esping-Andersen and Wagner, 2012). Then, how about the temporal mobility trends of Hong Kong? And, how could we take advantage of such insights to make sense of its trends? Before we move on to analyse the two mobility datasets, let us now take a look at the recent development in Hong Kong.

An overview: The recent development of Hong Kong

The post-War years have seen compacted changes in Hong Kong. In its early days, there were essentially three social strata in Hong Kong: the British ruling class at the top, the Chinese masses at the bottom, and a small number of local Chinese elites in the middle (Chan, 1991). Formal education was only for select few. There was not much room for social mobility, let alone upward mobility. But, industrialisation and the subsequent economic development in the 1960s and 1970s then provided individuals from all walks of life at the

time with an abundance of structural opportunities for upward mobility (Carroll, 2007). Meanwhile, without much opportunity for political participation under the colonial British rule, many individuals at the time were believed to be concerned more about their personal success, rather than the political development of Hong Kong and thus were willing to direct most of their energy to taking advantage of readily available structural opportunities for economic and social advancement (Lau and Kuan, 1988). In brief, against the context of a developing Hong Kong, many individuals, despite their class backgrounds and despite a minimal provision of education at the time (Sweeting, 2004), could find a way to get ahead. This, then, somehow constituted a general impression that Hong Kong of that period was a land of opportunity whereby social class—or one's class background—was not a barrier to economic and/or social advancement: One could change their class position through achievement and thus upward mobility was possible for the capable and the industrious.

The making of the Hong Kong dream

But, as mentioned above, Chan's (1994) study actually demonstrated that class still mattered in influencing an individual's class position in that period of Hong Kong. However, Chan also pointed out that the rapid economic development of Hong Kong at the time was like tides lifting all boats making it possible that, in absolute terms, a great number of individuals experienced upward mobility and improved their financial situations. In other words, class inequality and social mobility existed side by side in the Hong Kong of that period (Wong, 2010; *cf*. Chan *et al.*, 1995). In spite of the very existence of class inequality, many individual baby-boomers' actual social/economic successes and thus the public's perceived prospects for upward mobility at the time lay the foundation of an achievement ideology—i.e., the so-called "Hong Kong dream"—whereby Hong Kong is believed to be a land of opportunity where the capable and industrious will get ahead (Wong and Lui, 1992).

While the exact timing for the emergence of the Hong Kong dream remained uncertain, it was probably coined after the publication of Lau and Kuan's study (1988) in which the term was used to describe a discrepancy between general optimism and personal pessimism about the social openness of Hong Kong (Wong and Lui, 2000). But, much later on, it was deliberately used by the Hong Kong government to boost societal morale. For example, to end his speech in a meeting in the legislative council in 2003 in response to a

strong public demand for policy change in handling the issues of poverty and structural unemployment, the then-Financial Secretary packaged the Hong Kong dream with the phrase, "the Legend of the Lion Rock", which originated from a TV series on stories of Hong Kong people in that period called "Under the Lion Rock", produced by Radio and Television Hong Kong, to refer to the spirit of Hong Kong in dealing with adversity (Yeung, 2003).

What is implied in the Hong Kong dream is a formula of success constituting ability and effort and thus an individual accountability: Individuals fail to get ahead either because they are not capable or because they do not work hard enough. The Hong Kong dream is actually in line with the view implicit in the logic of industrialism: Achievement (e.g., ability and effort), rather than ascription (e.g., class background), determines an individual's class position. Somehow, the Hong Kong dream is believed to be one reason why many individuals in Hong Kong do not challenge its class inequality *per se*, but come to regard its unequal system as just and fair (Wong, 2011).

Recent challenges to the Hong Kong dream?

The ethos, in addition to a formula of success, inferred from the Hong Kong dream based on the social and economic success of baby-boomers in Hong Kong have become the so-called mainstream values in the public discourse: Economic prosperity is taken as one of its core values, and pursuing personal social and/or economic success is seen as of utmost importance to individuals. But this formula of success and such mainstream values are challenged in 21st Century Hong Kong. In a new century, complaints have been commonly heard from the younger generations that it is getting difficult, if not impossible, to develop a career and/or possess one's own apartment to raise a family (Pan, 2014; Forrest and Yip, 2015). Seemingly, however capable are the younger generations and however hard they work, they simply cannot achieve as much as their baby-boomer predecessors. But, what should be noted is that such complaints usually go with grievances over social inequality/injustice or social policies being inclined to the rich and/or the estate property developers. Apparently, what the younger generations nowadays are dissatisfied with is not simply their blocked social mobility, but also social inequality/injustice.

This concern of the younger generations about social equality/justice, rather than purely individual well-being, has been reflected more clearly in their recent political involvement in such large-scale social movements as "Protecting the Star Ferry" in 2006, "Keeping the Queen's Pier" in 2007, "Keeping Lee Tung Street" in 2007 and "Against the High Rail and Protect Choi Yuen Village" in 2008 (Ku, 2010, 2012). Unlike what had been the case in many social movements in Hong Kong in the past, participating in these social movements, these groups of the youth were not fighting for their personal benefit or the interests of the groups to which they belonged. Rather, they were personally unaffected; they were opposing the dominance of the value of economic development and fighting for such values as cultural heritage, green space and social justice. And, during the last months of 2014 (from late September 2014 to mid-December 2014), Hong Kong people were involved in the so-called "Umbrella Revolution/Movement" for 79 days, protesting against the decision announced by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the PRC on proposed reforms to the Hong Kong electoral system and fighting for a more democratic electoral system for Hong Kong. Many participants of the "Umbrella Movement" were young people (Yang and Liu, 2015; Phillips, 2014); some were even very outspoken. These young people took to the streets to fight not only for their personal interest, but for a more just and democratic Hong Kong (Chu and Law, 2014; Time, 2014). In contrast to the stereotype of Hong Kong people being political apathetic, these young people are politically very involved. Besides, they could see the relevance of the political reform of Hong Kong to their livelihood (Barber, 2014; Taylor, Chong and AFP, 2014).

Their political involvement and request could certainly be interpreted as the younger generations embracing a very different set of values from those implied in the Hong Kong dream. But, in view of the widely subscribed Hong Kong dream, the recent political involvement or even activism of the younger generations has basically left many puzzled, wondering if their involvement and/or activism is really purely due to their request for social justice and democracy, rather than a pursuit of personal interest, and speculating that their political involvement and/or activism is perhaps a symptom of the youth's frustration about being socially blocked in a more established and economically restructured Hong Kong (Cheung, 2014). Indeed, such speculation is implicit in one underlying concern highlighted in the Policy Address released on 14 January 2015: The government was concerned about how

to enhance the upward mobility of the youth (Hong Kong Government, 2015). However, we argue that such speculation or assertion is misplaced: Before we could establish a causal link between an increasing political involvement of the younger generations or their growing political discontent and/or activism on the one hand and their blocked social mobility on the other, we should first find out empirically whether the younger generations indeed suffer from blocked social mobility.

The validity of the Hong Kong dream for the younger generations?

We have to make sense of the speculation about blocked social mobility for the younger generations against a changing economic, social and political context of Hong Kong. Hong Kong, as a small economy, has been responsive, if not vulnerable, to global economic fluctuations; and, because of its proximity to the PRC, the economic development of Hong Kong has been inseparable from that of the PRC. And, it has become more so the case after the 1997 handover: The development of Hong Kong simply cannot be understood in isolation from the PRC's policies towards it. On the one hand, since the handover, there has been no lack of policies, such as Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), that could be interpreted as promoting upward mobility for Hong Kong people. Indeed, CEPA is meant to offer Hong Kong people opportunities for getting well-paid jobs in China, which may make upward mobility possible for some, albeit across the Hong Kong-China border. But, it is clear that such opportunities are not readily available to people working in all sectors, but only to those working in the trading, financial and professional sectors. On the other hand, there are also policies, such as the daily immigration quota of 150 mainlanders from the PRC to Hong Kong, that could be perceived as posing obstacles to the upward mobility of Hong Kong people. This daily quota surely exerts a greater societal demand for resource provision of various kinds (e.g., medical assistance, social welfare and education); this somehow makes many Hong Kong people feel that societal resources and thus opportunities for upward mobility have been re-allocated between permanent Hong Kong residents and new immigrants from the PRC, and that such allocation is skewed towards the latter at the expense of the former. Perhaps this immigration policy somehow contributes to a growing conflicting relationship between the so-called local Hong Kong people and the mainlanders. But, it remains to be seen how far Hong Kong people are indeed deprived of opportunities for upward mobility because of this policy.

The above-mentioned policies perhaps somehow influence Hong Kong people's perception about their prospects for upward mobility. Yet, their perception is not a substitute for empirical evidence. The effects of such policies on the prospects of Hong Kong people for upward mobility, which are beyond the scope of this paper, remain uncertain and should be investigated empirically. But, what could be sure was that since the handover Hong Kong had to weather economic adversity brought by the 1997 Asian financial crisis, then severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003, and the 2008 financial tsunami. The economic crises made many lose their jobs and some, reluctantly, received frozen pays and some even went bankrupt (Cheng, 2007). Against such an economic context, the job openings, including those of professional/managerial/administrative jobs, have been in decline. Even when there are such job openings, they have become less well-paid and/or less secure (e.g., contract-basis, rather than tenure). Indeed, generally speaking, the pays for many occupations and qualification holders—including those having a professional/managerial/administrative well-paid prestigious job or holding a degree—have remained largely the same for over a decade, as summarised in Figures 1 and 2. In short, it is observed that the previously secure well-paid socially-desirable jobs (e.g., professional/managerial/administrative jobs) have become replaced by their less secure and/or less well-paid counterparts, and that the required qualifications for nearly every job has been raised.

[Insert Figures 1 & 2 about here]

This trend is consistent with changes generally observed in the labour market and the education. Since the implementation of the PRC's open door policy in 1978, Hong Kong has been going through economic restructuring where the manufacturing sector has been contracting and the services sector has kept expanding; and, with the advent of the information age, the labour market has become more polarised where most jobs are either high-skilled high-paid or low-skilled low-paid. In other words, the number of reasonably well-paid jobs in the middle has perhaps been in great decline. Yet, meanwhile, a continuous expansion of education, especially the sector of higher education (Sweeting, 2004), boosts up the proportion of the working population that have at least a bachelor's degree and thus turns the younger generations into a highly educated workforce *vis-à-vis* their predecessors. But,

what is at issue is the availability of jobs matching the improved qualifications of the younger generations (Collins, 1979). Against a changing labour market, it seems reasonable to doubt the applicability of the formula of success implied by the Hong Kong dream to the younger generations nowadays.

Somehow, one could argue that it is wrong to interpret blocked social mobility as a trigger frustrating the younger generations and thus making them participate more in politics. Politically speaking, after its 1997 handover, people in Hong Kong are turned from colony subjects into their own masters. It should not be so surprising that Hong Kong people have become more concerned about the politics of Hong Kong, participate more politically and even desire more strongly for a political system of their own choosing. Alternatively, one could also argue that people living in more affluent Hong Kong may emphasise more self-expression than survival and may even be after such post-materialistic values as equality and justice. It is certainly worth our effort to investigate why the youth nowadays have become more involved in politics than their predecessors. But, it seems too ill-considered to reach a conclusion that the political participation and protests of the younger generations purely results from their blocked social mobility. Before reaching such a conclusion, we should examine whether, empirically speaking, the new generations indeed suffer from blocked social mobility *vis-à-vis* their predecessors.

To reiterate, we seek to examine this empirical issue by taking advantage of the two perspectives of social mobility mentioned at the outset. First, are there structural opportunities for social mobility available to the new generations *vis-à-vis* their predecessors? Second, if such opportunities are to exist, how far does class matter in influencing social mobility of the new generations? While Wong, Lui and Chan's study was conducted in 1989 (Wong and Lui, 1992; Chan, 1994; Chan *et al.*, 1995), it analysed the opportunities of social mobility for baby-boomers and their predecessors. In order to see how the new generations fare in Hong Kong after its handover, we need a more updated account of social mobility. What should be made clear is that we do not seek to examine generational effects on social mobility, for this requires a longitudinal panel of data. Instead, we seek to compare the patterns of opportunity for mobility for people interviewed in 2007 with such patterns for

those interviewed in 1989. Let us now turn to two datasets on which the subsequent discussion of this article is based.

Two mobility datasets

In this article, we shall use two mobility datasets: one is the 1989 Hong Kong Social Mobility Survey conducted by a mobility team at the University of Hong Kong and the other is the 2007 Social Inequality and Mobility Survey in Hong Kong carried out by a research team at the University of Science and Technology of Hong Kong. The two surveys are based on representative samples. In 1989 survey, 1,000 male household heads aged between 20 and 64 (i.e., born in the years between 1925 and 1969) were interviewed during three-and-a-half months of fieldwork in early 1989; 752 pairs of father and son were used for the analysis of intergenerational mobility (Wong and Lui, 1992:24-35). The 2007 Hong Kong survey, on a larger scale, interviewed the adult population (males and females) aged between 18 and 60 (i.e., born in the years between 1947 and 1989) between December 2006 and July 2007 (Wu, 2008). For the present purpose of making a comparative analysis, we confine our analysis to the working males—i.e., 1,043 pairs of father and son—from the sample of the 2007 survey.

What concern us here are two variables: class origin and class destination. Class origin refers to a respondent's class background and class destination the respondent's current class position. We follow the common practice in mobility studies using occupation as a proxy indicator of class position, classifying respondents by their current class position (son's class)—i.e., their current occupation—and referring to their fathers' occupation when respondents were 14 years old as a proxy indicator of their class origin (father's class). Such practices are criticised for being incomplete (Sorensen, 1986) and even sexist (Crompton, 1998). Despite such criticisms, because the consistency of measurement is crucial for a comparison, we exploit data for men only: information about father-and-son pairs. The occupations of male respondents and their fathers were coded into 4-digit ISCO88 (the third version of International Standard Classification of Occupations) occupational categories and then transformed into an 11-category version of the class scheme devised by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) according to Ganzeboom and Treiman's International Stratification and

Mobility File: Conversion Tools.[2] Different versions of the class scheme are summarised in Table 1 and the seven-category version is adopted for our discussion below. In making the intergenerational comparison, we shall exploit data about 752 pairs of father and son in 1989 and 1,043 pairs in 2007.[3] Now, let us move on to take a look at the class structure of Hong Kong over the two periods so as to see if the new generations nowadays are indeed faced with a more restrictive mobility regime.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Changes in class structure: 1989 *vs*. 2007

To have an idea about the class structure of Hong Kong in 1989 and 2007, we look into the class destinations of respondents[4] in the two periods at the time of interview. When the distributions of class destinations in 1989 and 2007 shown in Table 2 are compared, three major changes in class structure over this period are noted.[5] First, the non-manual sector—Classes I, II and III—has rapidly expanded whereby an increasing proportion of population become professionals, managers or administrators (Classes I and II) and routine non-manual workers (such as clerks and salespersons) (Class III). In particular, the size of Class III has doubled, increasing from hiring less than 10% of the respondents in 1989 to more than 20% of their counterparts in 2007. Second, the non-agricultural self-employed sector—Class IVab (i.e., small employers and the self-employed)—has been in slight decline, from comprising about 13% of the respondents in 1989 to less than 10% of their counterparts in 2007. And

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2 For details, please refer to the file of "Stata Version 1.2" by John Hendrickx (http://fmwww.bc.edu/repec/bocode/i/iskoegp.ado).

3 In order to maximise our sample size for comparison, the age range of sons in Table 2 for the 1989 column is 20-64 and it is 18-60 for the 2007 column.

4 Class origins of respondents are not used because what such information represents is not a class structure of a particular period, but a variety of class structures at different times (i.e., their fathers' class positions when respondents were 14 years old).

5 The datasets are statistical representative; however, when compared with the census data, Class V seems under-represented, and thus weighting is used. With regard to class destination, there are no respondents in the agricultural sector (Class IVc and Class VIIb) in the 1989 dataset and there are only six respondents in the same sector in the 2007 dataset. That was mainly because agriculture was reduced to its minimum in Hong Kong after industrialisation; but then, agriculture was encouraged again at some point after the 1997 handover.

third, the manual sector—Classes V, VI and VIIa—has been contracting drastically over the same period. More specifically, the contraction of Classes V and VI (i.e., technicians, supervisors and skilled manual workers) decreased from comprising about one-third of the respondents in 1989 to comprising just about one-eighth of their counterparts in 2007.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The three changes in class structure at two times observed from the two datasets are consistent with structural changes of the labour market of Hong Kong over the last few decades, as reported in the censuses over the years summarised in Figure 3. And, the recent shrinkage of the non-agricultural self-employed sector perhaps suggests that the structural features conducive to self-employment in the 1970s and 1980s argued by Chiu (1998) are no longer applicable to Hong Kong. It remains true that nearly all enterprises are small or medium sized in Hong Kong: 98% of most enterprises in present-day Hong Kong are considered as small and medium enterprises, according to the website of Hong Kong Trade and Industry Department. However, with a drastic increase in rent (Poon, 2011), it is getting more and more costly to get an enterprise started or to get it running than it was decades ago. The difficulty in running a business in relation to its high start-up cost and/or high operating cost cannot be reflected in the change in the proportion of small and medium enterprises. Rather, this could somehow be reflected in the turnover rate of small and medium enterprises; but, unfortunately, such statistics are not available. What could be sure is that the cheapest way of getting a business started by becoming a street vendor has become less feasible as a result of the implementation of the policy of no vendors since the early 2000s, when the government stopped giving out new vendor licenses; the number of vendor licences continued to drop, from 9,232 in the year 2000 to 6,347 in the year 2014, according to the website of the Hong Kong Food and Environment Hygiene Department.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

In brief, the class structure of Hong Kong in 1989 was rather different to what it was in 2007: The non-manual sector expanded, the manual sector contracted, and the non-agricultural sector of self-employment shrank. Indeed, the dissimilarity indices in Table 2 show that, over

this period of two decades, the class structure of Hong Kong has changed over 20%. The majority of the working population are employees, rather than running their own business (i.e., Class IVab); we are not sure about the implications of this observation for social mobility through self-employment. But, structural changes seem to suggest that room for upward mobility through employment actually becomes more readily available in 2007 than it was in 1989: there are more socially desirable middle-class (e.g., Classes I and II) occupations and fewer socially undesirable working-class jobs (e.g., Classes VI and VIIa). Then, does it mean that the new generations have more structural opportunities for moving upwards than their predecessors? This brings us to chances of intergenerational mobility for respondents at the two times.

Changes in structural opportunities: Absolute mobility rates, 1989 *vs.* 2007

Intergenerational mobility refers to a comparison of the respondent's class position with their father's. Against a changing class structure, it seems easy for individuals to move away from their class origins, ending up in various class destinations. Such rate of movement is captured by total mobility rate (TMR). TMR can be decomposed into total vertical mobility and total non-vertical mobility; and, total vertical mobility can be decomposed further into total upward mobility and total downward mobility. Table 3 reports TMR and their decomposed aspects for 1989 and 2007.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Rather interestingly, despite the observed changes in class structure, the TMRs in 1989 and 2007 are actually similar: About three quarters of respondents at the two times are socially mobile. But, a greater proportion of respondents in 2007 than in 1989 experienced vertical mobility; and most of them were upwardly mobile. This finding, however, does not square with the commonly heard complaint that upward mobility has become blocked in the new century. Then, does it imply that after all there is no lack of structural opportunities for upward mobility, and that the younger generations only have themselves to blame for failing to get ahead?

However, such mobility rates do not tell us any class effect on social mobility at the two times. In order to gauge such class effect, we need to rely on the concepts of inflow mobility and outflow mobility. Inflow mobility refers to class origins from where individuals of a particular class destination move, indicating the self-recruitment effect of a particular class destination. In contrast, outflow mobility refers to class destinations where individuals of a particular class origin would end up with, showing the retention effect of a given class origin. Let us take a look at inflow mobility in 1989 and 2007, as reported in Table 4.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Two points emerge from Table 4. Firstly, for most class destinations (son's classes) or for most columns of the Table, most of its members come from a different class origin and it is more so the case in 2007 than in 1989. And, it is particularly true of Classes I and II. Secondly, a greater proportion of Class VIIa sons came from Class VIIa in 2007 than in 1989; in addition, whereas nearly a quarter of the manual class (i.e., Classes V, VI and VIIa) came from a non-agricultural self-employed origin (Class IVab) in 1989, it was no longer true in 2007. Put simply, the self-recruitment effect of Classes I and II is rather weak but the self-recruitment effect of Class VIIa is quite strong; this, indeed, echoes changes in the class structure of Hong Kong—thus opportunity structure for social mobility—between 1989 and 2007 reported above.

Changes in opportunity structure for social mobility are also reflected in outflow mobility reported in Table 5. And two, perhaps somewhat contradictory, points are noted. The first is about the possibility for long-range mobility. On one hand, a greater proportion of respondents from Classes I and II indeed moved down to Class VIIa in 2007 than in 1989; and, on the other hand, a greater proportion of respondents from Class VIIa moved up to Classes I and II. In other words, there is much more long-range upward and downward mobility in 2007 than in 1989, suggesting an increasing level of social fluidity. The second point is about class effect. It was true that the proportion of sons of all classes getting a place in Classes I and II increased from 1989 to 2007; but, Classes I and II sons were still most likely to remain in Classes I and II, rather than getting into the other classes. Similarly, it was also true that where the non-agricultural sector was concerned the proportion of sons of all

classes, except Classes V and VI, getting a place in Class VIIa increased, albeit to different extents, from 1989 to 2007; but, Class VIIa sons were most likely to stay in Class VIIa, rather than getting into the other classes. In addition, although the proportion of Classes V and VI sons getting a place in Classes V and VI decreased from 1989 to 2007, the proportion of their sons who moved down to Class VIIa actually slightly increased over the same period. That is to say, despite an increasing possibility for mobility, even long rang mobility, the retention effect of Classes I and II and that of Class VIIa appear to be equally strong in 1989 and 2007.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

When those points observed from Tables 4 and 5 are taken together, a rather complicated picture emerges: It seems that a greater level of social fluidity is enhanced by an overall increasing rate of absolute mobility; however, simultaneously, class origin has still exerted a great impact on shaping class destination. That is, there is more room in Classes I and II making upward mobility possible for all classes, including making long-range upward mobility feasible for Class VIIa. But, the ability of Classes I and II to keep their sons in the advantaged middle class is better than that of the other classes to get theirs into it. And, while it becomes more feasible for Class VIIa sons to get upwardly mobile into Classes I and II, it remains equally difficult for Class VIIa sons to leave their class origin. In brief, all these seem to suggest that profound changes in the class structure of Hong Kong have brought more opportunities to all for upward mobility over the set decades but the distribution of such opportunities has somehow remained strongly influenced by class origin. Let us then turn to the trends of relative mobility rates in Hong Kong to see if such, albeit opposing, class effects suggested here are true.

Changes in social fluidity: Modelling relative mobility, 1989 *vs.* 2007

What is crucial in understanding social fluidity is whether individuals of different class origins enjoy an equal opportunity of social mobility. This is, to repeat, nicely captured by relative mobility rates measured in odds ratios.[6] Odds ratios capture the association between

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[6] There are two parts in odds ratio comparing the chances of being found in one class, say D(a), rather than another, D(b), for people from class origins O(c) with those for people from O(d). The first is the ratio of

class origins and class destinations and thus tell us the advantages and disadvantages associated with being born into one class, rather than another at a particular time. In examining changes in social fluidity in Hong Kong over the two decades, we shall focus on whether there is class effect on mobility opportunity—relative mobility rates—and whether, if so, such class effect is getting stronger or weaker over time. To reiterate, the two datasets are two mobility studies at two specific times but not a longitudinal study of the same group of people over time. Therefore, we could not examine any effect of social mobility on different generations. Rather, an improvement in relative mobility rates over the set period—a decrease in difference between people from different class origins in their chances of being found in one class destination, rather than another—implies that opportunities for social mobility for people interviewed in 2007 are more equally distributed between classes than those for people interviewed in 1989. In order to make sense of such class effect captured in changes in relative mobility rates (pattern of odds ratios) in Hong Kong between 1989 and 2007, we shall apply log-linear modelling to the full set of independent odds ratios: That is, the overall association between origins and destinations in the two mobility tables (Breen, 2004:33-36). Three models—Models A, B and C with equations listed below—are being fitted to the two mobility tables in order to see which model fits our data best: i.e., which model offers the most convincing account of changes in class effect on social mobility over the set period of time. The starting point of our investigation is a three-way mobility table (tables of three dimensions): class origin (O) by class destination (D) by the time of the survey (T).

$$\text{Log}\,(m_{odt}) = \lambda + \lambda_o^{O} + \lambda_d^{D} + \lambda_t^{T} + \lambda_{ot}^{OT} + \lambda_{dt}^{DT}$$

$$\text{Log}\,(m_{odt}) = \lambda + \lambda_o^{O} + \lambda_d^{D} + \lambda_t^{T} + \lambda_{ot}^{OT} + \lambda_{dt}^{DT} + \lambda_{od}^{OD}$$

$$\text{Log}\,(m_{odt}) = \lambda + \lambda_o^{O} + \lambda_d^{D} + \lambda_t^{T} + \lambda_{ot}^{OT} + \lambda_{dt}^{DT} + \beta_t\,\psi_{od}$$

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the frequencies in D(a) and D(b) among people who originate from O(c). The second is the ratio involving D(a) and D(b) for people from O(d). The odds ratio is the ratio of these odds. So, odds ratios equal:

$$\frac{\text{(The number in class A who originate from C divided by the number in class B who originate from C)}}{\text{(The number in class A who originate from D divided by the number in class B who originate from D)}}$$

Model A is a model of independence or perfect mobility whereby class has no effect on social mobility, in that class origin and class destination are assumed to be independent of each other. It is a baseline model serving as a reference point. Model B is a constant social fluidity model whereby class effect on social mobility is the same over time, in that relative mobility rates, measured in odds ratios, are postulated to be constant. The distributions of class origin and class destination in Model B are allowed to vary at different points in time, but the association between class origin and class destination is assumed to be identical in the two mobility tables. In other words, Model B indicates that relative mobility rates in the two periods are largely the same. And, Model C is a model of uniform difference whereby the effect of each class on social mobility is the same at the two times, in that the odds ratios in our mobility tables are assumed to differ uniformly between surveys (Xie, 1992). In Model C, the association between class origin and class destination takes the same pattern in two mobility tables but the strength of this association is allowed to differ: that is, it decomposes each logged odds ratio as the product of a common pattern (the expression with the $\square_{od}$ parameters) and a time-specific parameter ($\square_t$). The result of fitting different models to the two datasets are summarised in Table 6.[7]

[Insert Table 6 about here]

Under Model A, individuals are free to move from any class origin to any class destination. However, Table 6 indicates that Model A fits our mobility data poorly, meaning that there is no perfect mobility in Hong Kong. Taking Model A as a baseline model, we shall then

[7] To reiterate, there are no respondents in the agricultural sector (i.e., Class IVc and Class VIIb) in the 1989 dataset and there are only six respondents in the 2007 dataset. So, when a seven-category version of the class scheme (Table 1) is used (i.e., 7x7 mobility table) for model fitting, we have nine empty cells out of 49. To solve this empty cell problem, we tried to group sons from Class IVc with those from Class IVab, and group respondents from Class VIIb with those from Class VIIa, opting for a 7x5 (seven class origins and five class destinations) mobility table to fit our data, as Chan and his associates did for the 1989 dataset. And, we indeed checked and compared the results of using 7x5 and 7x7 mobility tables respectively for model fitting. For both the constant social fluidity model and multiplicative layer-effect model, 7x5 mobility table performs somewhat better than the 7x7 mobility table in terms of chi^2 and G^2 statistics; however, the former fails to satisfy the conventional standards of goodness of it in terms of p-value. Therefore, we decide to use 7x7 mobility table for model fitting. If interested, readers can contact the authors for the results of model comparisons.

compare Models B and C to see which model fits our dataset better. Under Model B, the association between father's class position and son's class position, if it exists, is constant at the two times. For example, if sons coming from Class I enjoy a higher chance of staying in Class I, rather than the other classes (i.e., odds ratios), then this chance would be the same in the two periods of time. In other words, in fitting this model, we seek to see if chances for all classes to stay in one class, rather than another remain the same over the time. Seemingly, such a temporal invariance in odds ratios in the two mobility tables imposed by Model B describes the Hong Kong mobility regime quite well. The deviance or likelihood-ratio (G^2 value) of 41.9 with 36 degree of freedom (df) with a p-value 0.28 provides a satisfactory fit by conventional statistical standards (Breen, 2004:23). This model captures 84.2% of the association between class origin and class destination (rG^2) and misclassifies only 5.3% of the cases (DI). This suggests that the hypothesis of having a constant social fluidity at two set times in Hong Kong provides a satisfactory account of the mobility data. This leads to the conclusion that there is a large degree of similarity in the patterns of social fluidity in Hong Kong of the two periods. This conclusion is similar to a point made by Wu (2009).

Then, how does Model C fit our data? At first glance, Model C seems to fit our data even better than Model B, though the difference is not great. When compared with Model B, the amount of the association between class origin and class destination captured by Model C is increased by 1% (i.e., 85.2%) and the same percentage of misclassified cases.[8] But, what deserves more of our attention is this. We refer to Xie's (1992) log-multiplicative layer effect, which could facilitate an analysis of the difference in vertical mobility between two mobility tables, to test Model C for the possibility of uniform changes from mobility table to mobility table in the direction of increasing or decreasing fluidity. When there is a set of baseline odds ratios, common to both tables, a scaled parameter (□) is taken as a table-specific multiplier that raises or lowers the overall strength of all the log-odds ratios in a uniform manner. Following this conventional practice, we set the value of the scaled parameter (□) to unity at 1 in the 1989 table, which means the fitted log-odds ratios are equal to the baseline set. For

[8] What should also be noted is that Model C loses one degree of freedom (i.e., 35df); in return, the reduction in G^2 is very small. And, the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) somehow indicates that Model B is better than Model C: That is, we could say that a constant social fluidity model describes the Hong Kong mobility regime better than the model of uniform difference.

the 2007 table, the scale parameter ($\square_2$) is found to be 1.3927. What this means is that there is a substantial rise—about 39%—in the association between class origin and class destination from 1989 to 2007: That is, an individual's class destination is much more strongly—about 39% more strongly—determined by his father's position in 2007 than his counterparts in 1989. And again, this growing importance of class origin in Hong Kong in shaping class destination was also in line with what was reported by Wu (2009).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this comparison of models B and C is a global test: It allows us to compare the patterns of social fluidity of Hong Kong as a whole at the two times. If we want to know more about changes in specific aspects of the social fluidity patterns of Hong Kong, as what had done by Chan and his associates for the 1989 dataset (1995), we should use the Erikson and Goldthrope's CASMIN (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations) core model to identify four effects of social mobility—namely, hierarchy effects, inheritance effects, sector effects and affinity effects. We made an attempt to do the same analyses for the 2007 dataset. However, the CASMIN core model (and locally modified models) do not fit the data by conventional standards of goodness of fit.

Despite this failure, two observations on change in parameters in the 1989 and 2007 CASMIN core model are perhaps still of some relevance to our discussion here. Compared with what is reported for 1989, hierarchy effects in 2007 turn out to be weaker but insignificant, while the inheritance effects become stronger. In the model, hierarchy effects are meant to capture the barriers to mobility across level boundary, specifically from the first level of Classes I and II to the second level of Class III, Class IVab and Classes V and VI, and then to the third level of Classes VIIa and VIIb; and, inheritance effects are meant to measure a general immobility effect, thus accounting for the propensity for people to stay in their class origin. What such changes in the two parameter meant was this: Compared with the 1989 mobility regime, barriers for people to move across a level boundary became weakened but the propensity for each class to retain its members in the same class was strengthened in 2007. That was to say, it became more feasible for sons to become mobile in 2007 than in 1989, even experiencing long-range mobility moving up from Class VIIa to Classes I and II or moving down from Classes I and II to Class VIIa; but, at the same time, sons of each class origin were more likely to stay in the same class in 2007, than in 1989.

Such results of weaker hierarchy effects and stronger inheritance effects are actually in line with the perplexing results we report above on inflow and outflow mobility. Yet, since the CASMIN core model fails to fit the 2007 dataset, such effects of the social fluidity patterns could at best remain a suspicion that needs to be empirically tested further; more empirical effort along this line of inquiry is called for.

Implications: The younger generations in Hong Kong suffering blocked mobility?

A comparison of the 1989 and 2007 mobility datasets has shown changes in the class structure and the social fluidity of Hong Kong. Specifically, more desirable jobs have become available and more undesirable jobs have disappeared, indicating that the middle class has been expanding and the working class shrinking. In short, more room at the top and lesser room at the bottom has indeed become available making it more feasible for social mobility, either upwards or downwards, and even for long-range social mobility. However, this seemingly increasing level of social fluidity is not accompanied by an equal distribution of chances for moving around, either for getting to the top or falling into the bottom. Seemingly, each class has become more strongly capable of retaining its members in the same class. In particular, we find that a middle class has expanded and become more heterogeneous exerting a somewhat weaker self-recruitment effect but a stronger self-retention effect, and that a working class has shrunk and become more homogeneous exerting both a stronger self-recruitment effect and a stronger self-retention effect. While newly-available high-paid prestigious middle-class jobs are indeed open to individuals of all classes, middle-class sons still stand a good chance of remaining in an expanding middle class. And, while individuals from all classes become less likely to obtain a low-paid undesirable working-class job because of its decreasing number, working-class sons still tend to be retained in a shrinking working class.

In sum, social mobility and class inequality existed side by side in Hong Kong in the two periods concerned. On one hand, structural opportunities for social mobility were available both in 1989 and 2007; and, the changes in the class structure of Hong Kong suggested further that there was even more room at the top in 2007 than in 1989. On the other hand, opportunities for social mobility were not equally distributed between classes both in 1989 and 2007; but, opportunities for social mobility seemed to be more unequally

distributed in 2007 than in 1989. In 1989, where an individual would end up with was determined by where their father had been; but, this became even more so the case in 2007. In other words, although more room for upward mobility has become available over this set period, whether individuals could get ahead has become increasingly enabled or constrained by their class origin (i.e., their father's occupation).

These findings, then, provide an empirical basis on which the prospects for social mobility of the younger generations nowadays in Hong Kong could be discussed. But, this is just a very first necessary step to engage in the discussion over whether the growing political discontent and activism of the younger generations is related to their actual experiences of social mobility; our data could by no means support a causal link that the growing political engagement of the youth results from their blocked social mobility. What we can say is that this comparison of the two mobility datasets lends some empirical confirmation, albeit somewhat complicated, to a general impression or speculation that the younger generations in Hong Kong enjoy lesser equality of opportunity for social mobility than their predecessors. That is, it is true that there is no lack of well-paid prestigious middle-class jobs around. But, whether the younger generations could take up such jobs seems to be increasingly dependent on their class/social background, implying that the formula of success implicit in the Hong Kong dream—i.e., ability and effort making one a success—has perhaps become less applicable to them than to their baby-boomer counterparts.

A professional, managerial, or administrative middle-class job, especially in an increasingly established industrial society, usually requires a relatively high formal qualification. Indeed, Wu (2009) also suggested that education was the most common strategy for the middle class to guard their children against downward mobility. Logically speaking, our conclusion on a growing importance of class origin in shaping class destination should remain tentative; before reaching this conclusion, we should examine whether class destination has become more determined by formal qualification and also whether the likelihood for individuals to obtain an advantaged qualification has become more determined by their class origin. In other words, it remains unclear about the role of class origin, in comparison with that of education, in shaping class destination. And this should be the next empirical question that we should address.

Finally, we end this paper with a puzzling note. Social mobility resulting from structural changes (or absolute mobility rates) is supposedly more visible and more easily perceived and felt by individuals. In contrast, social mobility due to changes in social fluidity (or relative mobility rates) is presumably more abstract and less easily perceived and felt, especially when people's reference groups are usually people of the same class background. This could perhaps somehow explain why Hong Kong people in the 1970s and 1980s felt hopeful about the prospects for social mobility against a context of class inequality. But then, given a broadly similar level of absolute mobility rates in 1989 and 2007 and given a slightly greater level of absolute upward mobility rates in 2007 (see Table 3), why were people in the 1970s and 1980s so optimistic about getting ahead in Hong Kong but people nowadays feel so gloomy and frustrated about their mobility future? Does this suggest that people at the two times perceive their chances for mobility differently, and why so, if it were really the case? Would it be because the younger generations nowadays, being more educated, are more able than their predecessors to see through the coexistence of social mobility and class inequality? This puzzle should be examined further so as to shed lights into understanding how people of different generations in Hong Kong make sense of social mobility against a context of class inequality, and thus why the younger generations nowadays are more frustrated than their predecessors about social inequality/injustice.

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Table 1. The class scheme

11-category version		**Seven-category version**	**Hierarchy**	**Sector**
I	Higher-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; managers in large industrial establishments; large proprietors (hiring 25 employees or more)	I+II service class	The (salaried) middle class	The non-manual sector (or the white-collar sector)
II	Lower-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; higher-grade technicians; managers in small industrial establishments; supervisors of non-manual employees			
IIIa	Routine non-manual employees, higher grade (administration and commerce)	III routine non-manual	The intermediate class	
IIIb	Routine non-manual employees, lower grade (sales and services)			
IVa	Small proprietors, artisans, etc. with fewer than 25 employees	IVab non-farm petty bourgeoisie		The self-employed sector
IVb	Small proprietors, artisans etc. without employees			

IVc	Farmers and smallholders; other self-employed workers in primary production	IVc farmers		
V	Lower-grade technicians; supervisors of manual workers	V+VI technicians, supervisors, skilled manual workers		The manual sector (the blue-collar sector)
VI	Skilled manual workers		The working class	
VIIa	Semi- and un-skilled manual workers (not in agriculture, etc.)	VIIa semi- and unskilled manual workers		
VIIb	Agricultural and other workers in primary production	VIIb farm workers		

Source: Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992)

Table 2. Distribution of class origins and class destinations for men in the labour force in Hong Kong

	Class of origin[a]		Class of destination[b]		Dissimilarity Index	
	1989	**2007**	**1989**	**2007**	**1989**	**2007**
I+II	11.17	11.29	22.61	29.22		
III	9.57	16.41	9.97	22.49	26.20	24.01
IVab	26.46	12.33	13.03	9.87		
IVc	6.91	9.30	0.00	0.28	[a] 23.685	
V+VI	20.88	15.09	32.05	13.76		
VIIa	19.15	33.49	22.34	24.10	[b] 21.450	
VIIb	5.85	2.09	0.00	0.28		

Table 3. Decomposition of total mobility rates, 1989 *vs.* 2007

Year	Total Mobility Rate	Total Vertical Mobility	Total Non-Vertical Mobility	Total Upward Mobility	Total Downward Mobility
1989	74.60	52.79	21.81	33.64	19.15
2007	73.91	59.30	14.61	41.65	17.65

Table 4. Inflow mobility rates, 1989 *vs.* 2007 (rates for 1989 on top row and for 2007 on bottom row)

Father's class (O)	Son's class (D)						
	I+II	**III**	**IVa+b**	**IVc**	**V+VI**	**VIIa**	**VIIb**
I+II	22.35	9.33	9.18	0.00	8.71	5.36	0.00
	16.56	9.28	15.38	0.00	6.21	7.87	33.33
III	13.53	20.00	8.16	0.00	7.88	4.17	0.00
	20.13	21.10	10.58	0.00	11.72	12.99	0.00
IVa+b	30.59	24.00	34.69	0.00	22.82	23.81	0.00
	19.16	8.86	31.73	0.00	4.83	3.94	0.00
IVc	1.76	4.00	9.18	0.00	7.05	11.90	0.00
	3.90	6.33	9.62	66.67	14.48	14.57	33.33
V+VI	18.82	25.33	16.33	0.00	24.48	18.45	0.00
	12.34	17.72	8.65	33.33	22.07	14.57	0.00
VIIa	11.76	14.67	18.37	0.00	21.58	25.60	0.00
	27.27	35.86	23.08	0.00	37.24	41.73	0.00
VIIb	1.18	2.67	4.08	0.00	7.47	10.71	0.00
	0.65	0.84	0.96	0.00	3.45	4.33	33.33

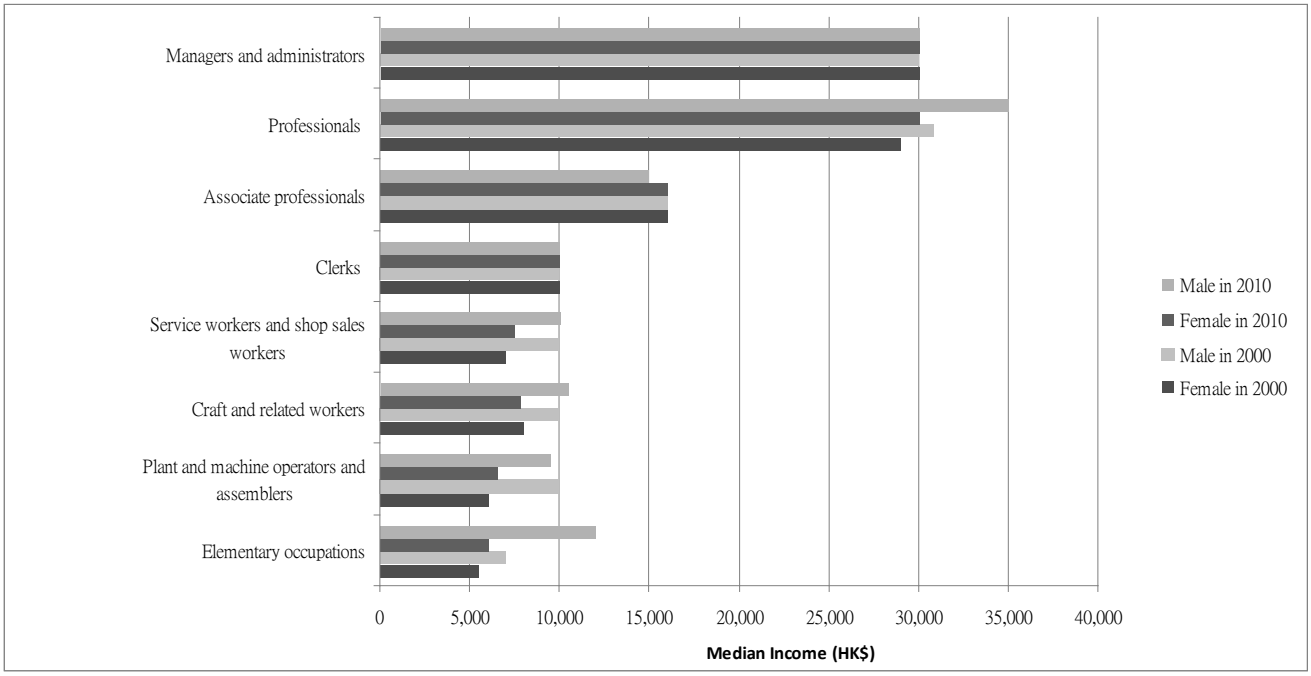
Table 5. Outflow mobility rates, 1989 *vs.* 2007 (rates for 1989 on top row and for 2007 on bottom row)

Father's class (O)	Son's class (D)						
	I+II	**III**	**IVa+b**	**IVc**	**V+VI**	**VIIa**	**VIIb**
I+II	45.24	8.33	10.71	0.00	25.00	10.71	0.00
	42.86	18.49	13.45	0.00	7.56	16.81	0.84
III	31.94	20.83	11.11	0.00	26.39	9.72	0.00
	35.84	28.90	6.36	0.00	9.83	19.08	0.00
IVa+b	26.13	9.05	17.09	0.00	27.64	20.10	0.00
	45.38	16.15	25.38	0.00	5.38	7.69	0.00
IVc	5.77	5.77	17.31	0.00	32.69	38.46	0.00
	12.24	15.31	10.20	2.04	21.43	37.76	1.02
V+VI	20.38	12.10	10.19	0.00	37.58	19.75	0.00
	23.90	26.42	5.66	0.63	20.13	23.27	0.00
VIIa	13.89	7.64	12.50	0.00	36.11	29.86	0.00
	23.80	24.08	6.80	0.00	15.30	30.03	0.00
VIIb	4.55	4.55	9.09	0.00	40.91	40.91	0.00
	9.09	9.09	4.55	0.00	22.73	50.00	4.55

Table 6. Results of fitting three models to the 1989 and 2007 mobility tables

	N	df	chi^2	p	G^2	rG^2	BIC	DI
Model A	1,806	72	280.4	0	265.2	0	-274.7	14.8
Model B	1,806	36	40.5	0.28	41.9	84.2	-228.1	5.3
Model C	1,806	35	38.1	0.33	39.2	85.2	-223.3	5.3

Figure 1. Median monthly employment earnings of employed persons (by occupation of main employment and sex), 2000 *vs.* 2010

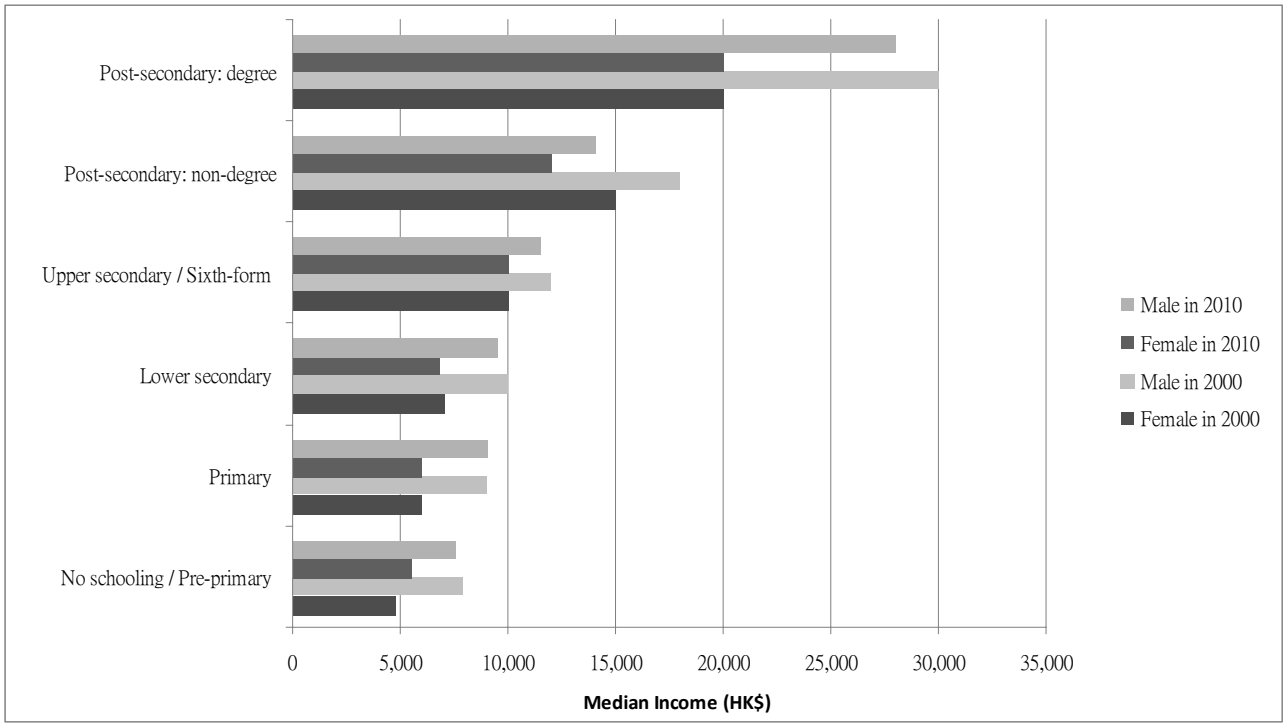


Notes:

1. Data exclude foreign domestic helpers.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3. Source: http://www.women.gov.hk/download/library/report/HK_Women2011_e.pdf (Table 4.2.1 (a))

Figure 2. Median monthly employment earnings of employed persons (by educational attainment and sex), 2000 *vs.* 2010

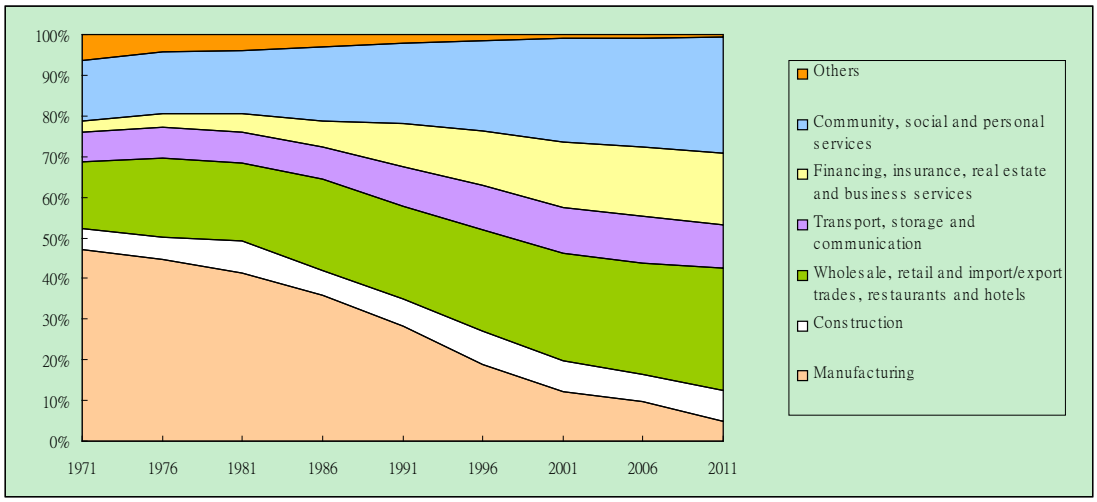


Notes:

1. Data exclude foreign domestic helpers.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source: http://www.women.gov.hk/download/library/report/HK_Women2011_e.pdf (Table 4.2.1 (b))

Figure 3. The working population by industry in Hong Kong, 1971-2011



Source: Hong Kong Census Reports, various years