

Professional Flows:

Lateral Moves of Law Firm Partners in Hong Kong, 1994-2018*

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Abstract

This article uses the case of law firms in Hong Kong to develop a conceptual framework for understanding lateral mobility in professional service firms. Based on the analysis of 1,464 lateral moves of law firm partners reported in 300 monthly issues of the official journal of the Law Society of Hong Kong during 1994-2018, as well as archival data and interviews conducted in Hong Kong, the article offers both a bird's-eye view of the lateral mobility of partners across law firms of different jurisdictional origins and an in-depth investigation of how the most elite firms in this market, namely the Magic Circle and Wall Street firms, are influenced by the dynamics of professional flows. Theoretically, the article reconceptualizes professional service firms as organizations connected by and transform through the flows of professionals between them, a dynamic process characterized by three key concepts: *waves*, *cycles*, and *turning points*. In addition to its theoretical contribution, the study also has broader implications for understanding Hong Kong's economic transformation since the 1990s, particularly after Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997 and the global financial crisis in 2008.

Keywords: professional service firm, lawyer, partner, mobility, Hong Kong

Published in the *Journal of Professions and Organization*. Cite as:

Liu, Sida, Daniel Blocq, Ali Honari, and Anson Au. 2022. "Professional flows: Lateral moves of law firm partners in Hong Kong, 1994–2018." *Journal of Professions and Organization* 9(1): 1-19.

* Research for this article received funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under the Insight Grants program (Grant No. 435-2018-0251). Direct correspondence to Sida Liu, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, 725 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2J4, Canada; E-mail: sd.liu@utoronto.ca.

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Law firms are cornerstones of the legal profession, yet they are constituted by the flows of lawyers through them. To understand the relationship between law firms and their lawyers, researchers have examined their training and promotion systems (Galanter and Palay 1991; Wilkins and Gulati 1998; Galanter and Henderson 2008), their enduring class, gender, and racial inequalities (Kay and Gorman 2008; Dinovitzer 2011; Headworth et al. 2016), their jurisdictional conflicts with other professions (Dezalay and Garth 2004; Liu 2015; Wilkins and Ferrer 2018), and their cross-border transactions and globalization (Flood 2007; Silver 2007; Ballakrishnen 2021). However, one aspect of this complex relationship is understudied: the mobility of lawyers across firms (but see Schleeff 2013; Rider and Tan 2015; Tan and Rider 2017; Dinovitzer and Garth 2020). Taking the firm as the default unit of analysis, past research often assumes that, once lawyers leave a firm, they are no longer relevant to the firm or the study of that firm.

What if the focus of research is shifted from the social organization of professional service firms to the flows of professionals through them? Specifically, what if the legal profession is not conceptualized structurally as “two hemispheres” of the bar (Heinz and Lauman 1982) or a market monopoly over legal services (Abel 1989), but as a continuous, fluid process of lawyer mobility (Liu 2013)? To make an analogy, if lawyers were grains and law firms were cups that hold them, then it would make sense to examine not only the grains in each cup but also how grains flow through these cups over time. This is the study of professional flows, an ecological and processual perspective for rethinking the relationship between firms and professionals.

In this article, we use the case of Hong Kong lawyers to develop a conceptual framework for understanding professional flows. Our study accomplishes this through the first systematic examination of a unique and valuable data source – the monthly reports of law firm

partner mobility in the *Hong Kong Lawyer* journal, the official journal of the Law Society of Hong Kong, from 1994 to 2018. During this 25-year period, 9,946 partner moves were reported in 300 monthly issues, providing a large and comprehensive database for analyzing patterns of professional flows in a major legal services market. Triangulating this lawyer mobility database with archival data and interviews conducted in Hong Kong, our empirical analysis offers both a bird's-eye view of the lateral mobility of partners across law firms of different jurisdictional origins and an in-depth investigation of how the most elite firms in this market, namely the Magic Circle and Wall Street firms (Smigel 1964; Galanter and Roberts 2008), adapted to professional flows and consolidated their dominant positions after Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997 and the global financial crisis in 2008.

The empirical analysis enables us to reconceptualize professional service firms processually (Abbott 1988, 2016; Liu 2013) as organizations connected by and transformed through the flows of professionals between them. Professional flows are not merely external disruptions to the growth and management of firms. They can be drivers of firms' organizational strategies and growth. This is especially true in an open and volatile market environment in which interfirm mobility is frequent, such as the legal services market in Hong Kong in the early 21st century. As partners leave some firms and join others, it could generate "vacancy chains" or "vacancy competition" (White 1970; Chase 1991; Rosenfeld 1992) as in other organizational settings. However, vacancy-based models are inadequate for understanding professional flows because, unlike government offices, churches, or football clubs, professional service firms do not always fill in the vacancy spot that a partner has left. We foreground and address the need to examine the mobility of these professionals in the ecology of firms and the temporality of such movements, and in so doing, develop a processual theory of professional flows.

Beyond Vacancy Chains: A Processual View of Professional Flows

Unlike government offices or business corporations, professional service firms are collegial organizations consisting of people with expertise, not political power or economic capital (Nelson 1988; Freidson 2001; Lazega 2001). For law firms, stratification and mobility are manifested most evidently in the two hemispheres of the bar (Heinz and Laumann 1982) and the tournament of lawyers in partner promotion (Galanter and Palay 1991; Galanter and Henderson 2008), in which class, gender, and racial inequalities are at work (Wilkins and Gulati 1996; Kay and Gorman 2008; Dinovitzer 2011). Once partnership is achieved, however, the lateral mobility of partners between firms is less studied and theorized, despite its increasing prevalence in the legal profession (Galanter and Henderson 2008). The limited number of existing studies focus more on geographic mobility (Dinovitzer and Hagan 2006; Dinovitzer 2006; Liu, Liang, and Michelson 2014; Harrington and Seabrooke 2020) rather than interfirm mobility in the same locality (Schleef 2013).

An influential theory for understanding the interfirm mobility of professionals is the vacancy chain model (White 1970; Chase 1991), which has been applied to study mobility in various occupations and labor markets, ranging from church ministers and mental hospital superintendents to football coaches and drug traffickers (Smith 1983; Smith and Abbott 1983; Abbott 1990; Friman 2004). The basic rationale of vacancy chains is that, once individuals leave their units, it generates a sequence of moves driven by the chain of vacant jobs. In a vacancy chain mobility system, “vacant units must be scarce ... and most individuals in a group already must have units so they can leave one behind when they move to a new one” (Chase 1991: 135-136). For example, Smith and Abbott (1983) find that the vacancy chains of U.S. college football

coaches are driven by “the movement of job vacancies down the hierarchy of prestige” (p. 1151) and internal exchange mobility is “small relative to mobility in and out of the market” (p. 1147).

However, for professional service firms and especially partnerships, the vacancy chain model has notable limitations (Abbott 1990). For one, partner hires in law firms are not always triggered by the vacation of a unit. To have a partner join a firm is not necessarily to replace another who has left, but to accommodate for a shift in the firm’s business strategy or changes in the organizational field. A new partner often brings with them client opportunities and/or expertise in a new practice area. Unlike a government office or a business corporation, a partnership firm can still function with the loss of several of its partners. In other words, positions in a professional partnership usually are not as rigid as in bureaucratic or corporate settings, let alone churches or sports teams, but more open and fluid. Although the rise of limited liability partnership (LLP) and multidisciplinary practice (MDP) in recent decades have made many law firms more bureaucratic than the traditional unlimited liability partnership (Wilkins and Ferrer 2018), they remain collegial organizations built on expertise (Nelson 1988; Lazega 2001). This makes the vacancy chain model less appealing for professional service firms as the “chain effect” is less significant and more unpredictable than in other organizational contexts. The emergence of the gig economy and more fluid and digital work settings for service industries in the early 21st century (Spreitzer et al. 2017; Wood et al. 2019; Yao 2020) makes vacancy-based models based on labor market mobility in 20th-century industries and occupations even less appealing.

These limitations of the vacancy chain model suggest the need for a new theoretical approach for examining the lateral mobility of professionals. Recent organizational studies on lateral hiring in large US law firms offer useful empirical evidence for developing such an

approach. For instance, Rider and Tan (2015) find that higher-status firms are more likely to hire a partner from a more profitable competitor, and they are more likely to lose a partner to a more profitable lower-status firm. Tan and Rider (2017) further demonstrate that losing partners to high-status competitors can signal to potential future employees that the firm offers a prestigious career experience and thus enhance the firm's status. Kim et al. (2016) find a reversed U-shape relationship between the size of a law firm's lateral hiring and its financial performance, which is moderated by the firm's associate-partner ratio. Carnahan et al. (2021) suggest that law school ties between practice area leaders reduce interfirm mobility between practice areas, especially for law firms with comparable cultures. These studies shift the mechanisms of lateral mobility in law firms from vacant positions to status, profitability, and network ties, yet the focus of research remains on individual firms or positions rather than the flows of professionals in the ecology of law firms (Liu and Wu 2016).

We build upon yet advance this work by incorporating temporality (Abbott 2001) into our novel ecological and processual view of professional service firms (Abbott 1988; Liu 2013) that proposes professional flows as an alternative approach to the vacancy chain model for understanding lateral mobility in professional services. Our starting point is to change the unit of analysis from positions or firms to the whole professional service market as an ecology consisting of firms and professionals. Rather than following the sequence of vacant positions in each firm (Smith and Abbott 1983) or every step of an individual's career path (Dinovitzer and Garth 2020), we trace the spatial and temporal flows of professionals in the entire ecology. In the case of law firms, this means to examine the lateral moves of lawyers between firms not as sequential chains, status competitions, or social exclusions (Ashley and Empson 2017), but as a

fluid and interconnected social process across the landscape of the legal services market (Schleef 2013).

We theorize the processual dynamics of professional flows in terms of three novel concepts: *waves*, *cycles*, and *turning points*. Waves are large-scale flows of professionals in a certain direction in the ecology of a professional service market. A wave can be generated by the entrance of new firms or practitioners into the market, the mergers or splits of existing firms, regulatory policy changes, or other “system disturbances” (Abbott 1988). For example, the rapid increase of foreign law offices in China in the early to mid-2000s led to a wave of associate moves from Chinese corporate law firms to US and UK law firms in Beijing and Shanghai (Liu 2008). The global dissolution of Arthur Anderson, one of the Big Five accounting firms, after the Enron scandal in 2001 also generated a wave of lateral moves for accountants in many countries.

Whereas waves are directional moves, cycles are recurring, circular moves of professionals centered around a small number of firms. By definition, a cycle has a certain degree of autonomy from the rest of the ecology and it is often an indicator of either dominant or segregated ecological positions of specific firms. A classic example is the mobility of solicitors within the “Magic Circle” of five elite law firms in London, which have long resided at the apex of the English legal profession (Galanter and Roberts 2008). It is important to note, however, that cycles are dynamic processes of professional mobility rather than static, exclusive clubs of elite firms, as the neo-Weberian theory of social closure assumes (Abel 1989; Saks 2010). Although many elite English solicitors circulate within the Magic Circle, there are also frequent lateral moves in and out of it. In other words, a cycle resembles a water swirl more than a gated community. It has a high degree of endogeneity, yet its boundary remains open and porous for professional flows (Liu 2018).

Both waves and cycles generate, sustain, and shift the lateral mobility of professionals between firms, but neither concept can fully capture the temporal dynamics of professional flows at certain historical moments that radically change the spatial configuration of the ecology, such as a global financial crisis, a regional war, a major social movement, or a pandemic. We call these moments turning points (Abbott 2001), in which the whole ecology is in flux with the links between firms and professionals significantly loosened. Like the effect of a revolution on a political system, such turning points have the capacity to break existing cycles and generate new waves in the ecology. Although turning points are brief moments in history, their ecological impact can last for years and only be fully understood by examining the ecological patterns of professional flows beyond individual firms.

In sum, our theory of professional flows reconceptualizes lateral mobility in professional service firms in two important aspects. First, it changes the unit of analysis from individual firms or positions to the ecology of firms. Rather than focusing on the sequential effects of vacant positions, it examines the waves, cycles, and turning points of professionals' mobility across the ecology of firms. Second, it makes no assumption on the existence of particular positions or firms but investigates the spatial and temporal distributions of firms and professionals in the professional ecology. Some firms may merge or dissolve and others may be founded, yet the flows of professionals do not stop. Therefore, to trace the network patterns and social processes of their flows in the ecology is a more promising approach for understanding the mobility of professionals than the vacancy chain model, especially in the more flexible and fluid economies and work settings of the 21st century (Spreitzer et al. 2017; Cheng and Park 2020).

Data and Methods

For studying professional flows, Hong Kong is an exceptionally rich research site. It has been a major international business and financial center and served as a gateway between China and the world for more than a century (Tsang 2004; Liu and Au 2020). As a postcolonial city, Hong Kong benefited from the British legacy of strong and autonomous professions (Ng 2009; Tam 2012; Lee 2017). Its legal profession follows the English system with two branches of barristers and solicitors. While barristers work in chambers and specialize in court litigation, solicitors in law firms handle corporate and transactional work. As the professional association for solicitors, the Law Society of Hong Kong (HKLS) regulates the registration of solicitors and their firms, including foreign lawyers in Hong Kong.

Unlike the predominant local memberships of bar associations in most jurisdictions, the HKLS membership is highly international given the unique economic and geopolitical positions of Hong Kong. As of December 31, 2019, the Law Society had 10,344 members with practicing certificate in Hong Kong and 1,688 registered foreign lawyers from 33 jurisdictions (Law Society of Hong Kong 2019). Dominated by UK-trained solicitors and English law firms for most of the colonial era, the HKLS started to loosen its requirements for foreign lawyers and law firms since the mid-1980s (Law Society of Hong Kong 1987). After Hong Kong's handover to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997, registered foreign lawyers, including lawyers licensed in mainland China (i.e., "PRC lawyers"), have consistently accounted for approximately 10-15% of Hong Kong solicitors (Hsu 2020: 810). Even among Hong Kong-licensed solicitors, many are originally from other jurisdictions (PRC, Australia, Canada, UK, US, etc.) and subsequently qualified in Hong Kong by completing local licensing prerequisites such as the Overseas Lawyers Qualification Examination. These lawyers are "transnational professionals"

whose practice is “not wholly constrained ... by the geographic boundaries or authority of the licensing body” (Harrington and Seabrooke 2020: 401).

The international and highly fluid nature of the Hong Kong legal profession makes it a good case for analyzing the mobility of lawyers as it captures both the local and global dynamics of professional flows. In comparison to other major business centers such as Tokyo, London, or New York, professional flows in Hong Kong are arguably more dynamic and complex. As lawyers moved across firms and in and out of Hong Kong, the ecology of law firms in Hong Kong experienced notable changes over time. Some changes were the consequences of external “system disturbances” (Abbott 1988), such as the 1997 handover, the 2008 global financial crisis, or the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests, while others were generated by events internal to the professional ecology, such as the changing regulatory rules on foreign law firms since the mid-1980s or the increasing associations between Hong Kong and PRC law firms in recent years (Liu and Au 2020).

According to the HKLS’s 2019 Annual Report, as of December 31, 2019, there were 932 Hong Kong law firms, 91 registered foreign law firms, and 41 registered associations between Hong Kong and registered foreign law firms (Law Society of Hong Kong 2019). Note that many long-established foreign law firms in Hong Kong are localized and registered as Hong Kong law firms. Localization is especially common among firms originally from other common law jurisdictions such as the UK, the US, Australia, and Canada. PRC firms are newcomers to the Hong Kong legal services market, only starting to set up offices and merge with local firms in the 2010s (Liu and Au 2020). As Hong Kong law requires a three-year association between a local firm and a registered foreign firm before a full merger, many PRC law firms currently are still in the transitional stage of associations with Hong Kong firms. Only five PRC firms had

been fully localized by 2019 (Liu and Au 2020). In the present study, all these localized firms from other jurisdictions are coded not as Hong Kong firms but as firms from their home jurisdictions.

From December 2018 to May 2019, we collected the 300 monthly reports of law firm partner mobility in the *Hong Kong Lawyer* journal during 1994-2018. While the monthly reports in recent years were digitized and made available on the HKLS's official website, the earlier reports were collected from hard copies of the journal in the University of Hong Kong Library. The reports were based on official HKLS records and provided the most comprehensive and accurate partner mobility information in Hong Kong, including all law firms in both the corporate and personal hemispheres of the legal profession. However, they did not include information on the mobility of law firm associates and thus the scope of our data collection and analysis was limited to partners only. In this 25-year period, there were a total of 9,946 partner moves reported in the journal under the "Partnerships and Firms" column. However, not all the "moves" reported in this column were lateral moves between law firms. They also included internal promotions from associate to partner, the opening of new solo practices, as well as the mobility of partners in and out of Hong Kong or in and out of the legal profession.

To analyze this large body of archival data, we first created a full database of all the 9,946 reported partner moves. The database includes information of partner names, the names of the firms that they joined and/or left, as well as the reported time (year and month) of the moves. All the law firms in our database were coded into five categories based on the firm's home jurisdiction: (1) Hong Kong firms ("HK"); (2) UK firms ("UK"); (3) US firms ("US"); (4) PRC firms ("CH"); (5) firms from the rest of the world ("RW"). Some multinational law firms that have two or more national origins were coded into the jurisdictions of their oldest offices (e.g.,

Dentons, DLA Piper, and Norton Rose Fulbright were coded as UK firms). As our theoretical interest lies in professional flows in the ecology of law firms, we excluded all the alternative forms of moves that did not have both a sending firm and a receiving firm, which resulted in a sub-dataset of 1,464 lateral moves between law firms. Arguably, this step could result in some missing data as not all lateral moves of partners were reported in the journal with both a sending firm and a receiving firm. After verifying with alternative data sources (e.g., firm websites and partners' LinkedIn profiles), however, we found that the amount of missing data was small and the overall accuracy of the data reported by the HKLS was high. This sub-dataset of 1,464 lateral moves is the focus of the subsequent data analysis in this article, while the rest of the full database will be used in future work on other related topics of lawyer mobility such as exiting the profession.

To complement the *Hong Kong Lawyer* data, we collected annual reports of the HKLS since the 1980s and news reports from Hong Kong-based and international legal media, particularly stories on the expansion and restructuring of major UK, US, and PRC law firms in Hong Kong and the partner moves among those firms and elite Hong Kong law firms. In addition, our analysis drew upon 16 interviews with law firm partners and associates that the first author conducted in Hong Kong in July 2018.⁵ Although subsequent fieldwork in Hong Kong was postponed indefinitely due to the anti-extradition bill protests in 2019 and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic, the pilot interviews conducted in 2018 provided valuable qualitative data on Hong Kong's corporate law firms and the mobility of their lawyers. In the following sections, we use the interview and archival data to support the results of our quantitative analysis of the data on partner moves from the *Hong Kong Lawyer* journal.

⁵ The interviews were coded in the form of "HK1801", in which "HK" refers to Hong Kong, "18" refers to the year of the interview (i.e., 2018), and "01" refers to the number of the interview conducted in that year.

The Bird's-Eye View: General Patterns of Lateral Mobility

The professional flows of Hong Kong lawyers since the 1990s have been influenced by three major historical turning points, namely (1) the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, (2) the 2008 global financial crisis, and (3) the anti-extradition bill protests and COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2020. While the most recent turning point is beyond the time range of our data and thus it has to be left to future research when more recent data become available, our data analysis shows notable influences of the first two turning points on the patterns of professional flows in the ecology of law firms in Hong Kong.

----- Figure 1 about here -----

Figure 1 presents the annual numbers of partner moves in both the full database and the sub-dataset from 1994 to 2018. Although total number of moves increased over the 25-year period ($y = 2.2754x + 283.34$, $R^2 = 0.1496$) while lateral moves between law firms largely remained flat ($y = -0.3869x + 63.47$, $R^2 = 0.0178$), there exists important heterogeneity in the two types of moves across the 25 years that hearkens to the possible influence of historical turning points. We observe more than 100 lateral moves between firms in 1997, the year of Hong Kong's handover from the UK to the PRC. Note that there was also a spike in the total number of partner moves during 1999-2001, which suggests increased flows of lawyers in and out of Hong Kong and/or the legal profession after the 1997 handover. By contrast, 2009 was the year with the lowest number of total moves, which was probably related to the negative impact of the 2008 global financial crisis on both the opening of new partnerships and the promotion of new

partners in existing firms. These general trends indicate the possible influence of historical turning points on the professional flows of lawyers in Hong Kong. The contrast between total moves and lateral moves also suggests a notable limitation of the vacancy chain model for understanding career mobility in law firms. Because many partners do not move laterally from one firm to another but pursue alternative moves in and out of the legal services market, career mobility in this market is not primarily driven by vacancy chains between firms.

----- Figure 2 about here -----

Figure 2 presents the network patterns of partner moves in the 25-year dataset of lateral mobility, which is then divided into three time periods: (1) 1994-2000; (2) 2001-2008; (3) 2009-2018.⁶ We used the ForceAtlas2 algorithm in this visualization. ForceAtlas2 is a force directed layout for spatializing a network, in which “nodes repulse each other like charged particles, while edges attract their nodes, like springs” (Jacomy et al. 2014: 2). These forces create a movement that converges to a balanced spatial configuration of the whole network by reducing the visual distance between poorly connected nodes and better-connected nodes, thus bringing into better focus the network positions and interconnections of the groups in which nodes are embedded. Conceptually, proximity represents the number of common relationships between nodes. The color of an edge reflects the jurisdiction of the receiving firm. Hong Kong firms are coded in pink, UK firms in blue, US firms in light green, PRC firms in dark green, and firms from the rest of the world in orange.

⁶ We divided the first two periods at 2000 because a major economic consequence of Hong Kong’s 1997 handover to the PRC was the increasing use of Hong Kong as a gateway for China’s outbound investment and the financing of Chinese companies through the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (Huang 2008). This took several years to develop and accelerated after China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001.

As Figure 2 shows, the network structures in the three periods display notable differences. In 1994-2000, there was no major cluster of partner moves and professional flows were spread out in the network. In 2001-2008, a blue and light green cycle began to form near the top-right corner of the network structure, which was dominated by partner moves to or from foreign law firms, especially UK and US firms. A closer examination of this emerging cycle of lateral moves reveals that major nodes within it were mostly elite UK and US corporate law firms. They include the five Magic Circle firms (Allen & Overy, Clifford Chance, Freshfields, Linklaters, and Slaughter & May), other major UK firms (Bird & Bird, Hogan Lovells, Norton Rose, Simmons & Simmons, etc.), and a variety of US firms (Coudert Brothers, DLA Piper, Latham & Watkins, Mayer Brown, Morrison & Foerster, Orrick, Pau Hastings, White & Case, etc.). Interestingly, Baker & McKenzie, arguably one of the most global-oriented US law firms with a substantial presence in Hong Kong, was only located at the margin of this emerging elite cycle, with moves to both firms within the cycle and outside of it. This suggests that Baker & McKenzie had more partner moves to or from local law firms in Hong Kong than many of its US peers, an indicator of its higher degree of localization.

In addition to UK and US firms, the emerging elite cycle in 2001-2008 also included a few major Hong Kong firms such as Johnson Stokes & Master (JSM) and Stevenson, Wong & Co. Note that JSM, one of the largest and most prestigious Hong Kong law firms, was combined into the US firm Mayer Brown in January 2008. Its position in the network structure in 2001-2008 suggests that JSM already had many exchanges of partners with elite UK and US firms before its merger with Mayer Brown. Another notable case is the Australian firm Mallesons Stephen Jaques, which was located at the top of the network structure in 2001-2008. Although its location was at the margin of the elite cycle, the firm mostly had partner moves with other

foreign law firms but not Hong Kong law firms. Mallesons later formed a strategic alliance with the PRC firm King & Wood in 2012 to become King & Wood Mallesons (KWM), one of the few global law firms headquartered in Hong Kong (Liu and Wu 2016).

In 2009-2018, the elite cycle of lateral moves in the network structure became notably more endogenous with a larger number of moves than the cycle in 2001-2008. While UK and US firms remained in their central positions, Hong Kong firms were no longer members of this elite cycle. Stevenson, Wong & Co., for instance, moved to the middle of the network structure in 2009-2018 and had more lateral moves with other Hong Kong firms than with foreign firms in this period. As newcomers to the Hong Kong legal services market, PRC firms only made limited progress in breaking into the elite cycle. Despite occasional poaching of partners from Magic Circle or Wall Street firms, many of their new partners were either former associates in UK or US firms or former partners in Hong Kong, Canadian, or Australian firms (Liu and Au 2020).

----- Table 1 about here -----

The emergence of this Anglo-American elite cycle is confirmed by our analysis of network centrality in the three periods. Table 1 presents the results of the top 10 firms in terms of outdegree centrality and indegree centrality, which measure the number of partners a firm sent or received in a certain period. A striking finding in this analysis is that Hong Kong firms moved away from high-centrality positions over the 25 years, mostly replaced by elite US and UK firms. This change occurred first in terms of indegree centrality in 2001-2008 and expanded to both types of centrality in 2009-2018. The number of Hong Kong firms in the top ten firms by

indegree centrality, for instance, slipped from 7 in 1994-2000, to 4 in 2001-2008, and finally to a mere 2 by 2009-2018. The number of UK and US firms in the same measure, by contrast, rose from 2 in 1994-2000, to 5 in 2001-2008, to 7 in 2009-2018. In other words, elite UK and US firms occupied considerably more central positions in the lateral moves of partners in the 2010s than in earlier periods, displacing their Hong Kong counterparts. Although the top firms in terms of both outdegree centrality and indegree centrality in the 2009-2018 network appeared to be King & Wood, Mallesons, and KWM, this was the result of their 2012 merger mentioned above. If this KWM merger was excluded from the analysis, considering that it was an organizational restructuring rather than a number of individual moves across different firms, then the most high-centrality firms in this period were either UK or US firms. This marks a sharp contrast to the two earlier periods and shows the formation of an elite cycle of partner moves among Anglo-American firms.

Outside the increasingly connected and concentrated elite cycle of lateral moves between foreign firms, the moves of partners between Hong Kong firms were isolated events that do not form any notable pattern in the network. Even the largest local corporate law firms like Deacons or JSM did not form any cycle of moves among themselves. This suggests that the primary lines of social differentiation in the law firm ecology in Hong Kong are not only between the corporate and personal hemispheres of the legal profession (Heinz and Laumann 1982) but also between elite Anglo-American law firms and the rest of (mostly local) law firms.

The Regional View: Mobility between Firms from Different Jurisdictions

After presenting the bird's-eye view of the ecology of professional flows, in this section we further investigate the lateral mobility between firms from different jurisdictions. Table 2

presents the number of lateral moves of partners between firms from the five types of jurisdictions in 1994-2018. Not surprisingly, the majority of partner moves were between Hong Kong law firms, which accounted for 59.2% of all lateral moves (867 out of 1,464). However, this also means that 40.8% of all lateral moves involve at least one foreign law firm, which shows a high degree of internationalization of the Hong Kong legal profession. Among foreign law firms, US firms received the largest number of partners from other firms, 193 in total. UK firms received 174 partners from other firms. PRC firms and firms from the rest of the world received considerably smaller numbers of partners (38 and 26, respectively).

----- Table 2 about here -----

An important finding in our regional analysis is about the homogeneity of lateral hiring, that is, the extent of which a firm hires partners from other firms of the same jurisdiction. As Table 2 shows, UK firms were most likely to take partners from other UK firms – 46% (80 out of 174) of the partners they received were lateral moves from other UK firms, 24.1% (42) were from Hong Kong firms, and 19.5% (34) were from US firms. By contrast, 34.7% (67 out of 193) of the partners US firms received were from other US firms, 32.6% (63) were from Hong Kong firms, and 27.5% (53) were from UK firms. One possible explanation is the earlier entry of UK firms into Hong Kong than their US counterparts because of the British colonial history. Some elite US firms only began to expand in Hong Kong in the 2000s and thus they had to poach more partners from UK and Hong Kong firms than from each other.

For PRC law firms, the homogeneity in partners' lateral moves is less salient due to their late arrival in Hong Kong. Out of the 38 partners PRC firms received, 13 were from other

PRC firms, 7 from Hong Kong firms, 3 from UK firms, and no partner was hired from US firms. There were 15 partner moves from firms from the rest of the world to PRC firms, many of which were the result of the KWM merger discussed above. Another interesting finding is that PRC firms lost more partners to Hong Kong firms than any other firm region – 15 partners moved from a PRC firm to a Hong Kong firm, even more than the 13 partner moves between PRC firms. In comparison, 5 partners moved from a PRC firm to a UK firm, and only one moved to a US firm. It is also notable that PRC firms not only received 38 partners in total but also sent 34 partners to other firms. Thus, while it is common knowledge that PRC law firms recruited many partners in Hong Kong in the 2010s, our results add nuance to this picture by identifying a substantial amount of attrition of partners from these relatively new Chinese law offices. Our results confirm the mobility patterns observed in the network structures in Figure 2, that is, PRC firms were not yet central players in the elite circle of partner mobility, despite their large-scale entry into Hong Kong in the 2010s.

----- Table 3 about here -----

Homogeneity is only one side of the story of professional flows, however. Table 3 presents the mobility patterns across the five categories of firms in 1994-2000, 2001-2008, and 2009-2018. While moves to and from Hong Kong firms accounted for the majority of moves in 1994-2000, the mobility of partners between UK and US firms increased over time and became even more frequent than the moves between UK and Hong Kong firms or US and Hong Kong firms in 2009-2018. Meanwhile, the number of moves between Hong Kong firms substantially declined during the 25-year period, from 371 moves in 1994-2000 to 282 moves in 2001-2008

and then to 212 moves in 2009-2018. These trends echo the results of the network analysis in the previous section, corroborating the existence of an elite cycle of lateral moves mainly consisting of UK and US firms that emerged in the Hong Kong legal profession in the early 21st century.

A striking result in Table 3 is that PRC firms had no partner move with any other category of firms in the first two periods, but in the third period partner moves were observed between PRC firms and all the other four categories of firms, with the exception that there was no partner move from a US firm to a PRC firm. In other words, all the partner moves involving PRC firms in Table 2 occurred during 2009-2018. This shows the importance of the 2008 global financial crisis as a critical turning point for the subsequent expansion of Chinese law firms in Hong Kong (Li and Liu 2012), which generated flows of partners to and from them in the next decade (Liu and Au 2020). It also suggests that partner moves in the 1990s-2000s was unrelated to PRC firms but mostly driven by the market competition and collaboration among Hong Kong and foreign firms.

However, many more partner moves between UK and US firms were observed in 2009-2018 than in the two earlier periods. In the 15 years from 1994 to 2008, UK firms only received 5 partners from US firms and sent 10 partners to US firms. By contrast, in 2009-2018, UK firms received 29 partners from US firms and sent 43 partners to US firms. The dramatic increase in the flows of partners between these two categories of firms is an indicator of heated competition for talents in the high-end corporate sector of the Hong Kong legal services market from the late 2000s to the mid-2010s. In particular, from 2009 to 2013, there was a strong wave of partner moves from UK firms to US firms, and UK firms only responded by hiring more from US firms after 2013. A partner who joined a US firm from a UK firm during this wave explained what happened then:

Why did US law firms start competing in the Hong Kong market? After 2004, there was no dual IPO [of Chinese companies] in Hong Kong and the US. People did not see the need to have a separate US firm...so US firms started to develop Hong Kong law capacity. Skadden was the first to hire a partner from Latham, and Latham was the first to have Hong Kong law capacity, hiring a partner from Allen & Overy. Davis Polk got someone from Freshfields, someone from Linklaters, and someone else. ... It was 2011, all the leading capital market lawyers came to US law firms. It was quite a big earthquake at the time. UK firms were threatened by US firms, and firms like Davis Polk were able to get big deals. Doubled the number of competitors in the market. From 2013 to 2015, all the biggest deals had at least one US firm involved. (HK1814)

The wave of partner moves between elite US and UK firms in that period, as this quote suggests, was driven by the rising capital market deals involving Chinese companies in Hong Kong. As large Chinese state-owned enterprises and private companies began to actively invest abroad in the 2000s, Hong Kong became a key financial gateway for them to go public and raise capital (Huang 2008). This brought lucrative IPO and M&A deals for corporate law firms in the city. While elite UK firms and a few large local firms like Deacons and JSM used to monopolize those deals, the rapidly rising scale and impact of Chinese capital attracted Wall Street firms to join the party in the late 2000s. This generated a wave of partner moves from major UK and Hong Kong firms to US firms and facilitated the formation of the cycle of lateral moves among elite Anglo-American firms.

A second wave of partner moves occurred in the mid to late 2010s, though our data only captures the beginning of this ongoing wave. Mostly driven by the entry of PRC firms into Hong Kong, several partners joined elite Red Circle firms like Jun He, Fangda, or Jingtian & Gongcheng from major UK or Hong Kong firms (Liu and Au 2020; Zhu et al. 2020). However, it was much more common for PRC firms to recruit senior associates from elite UK or US firms as partners in their Hong Kong offices than to laterally hire partners from those firms. As one of the partners who joined a PRC firm from a major Hong Kong firm commented, for partners in elite firms, “there is still a stigma of joining a Chinese firm in Hong Kong” (HK1804). Accordingly, many PRC firms adopted the strategy of offering the prize of partnership to senior associates in those firms who were originally from mainland China and qualified in both Hong Kong law and PRC law (HK1807; HK1812). With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Peter Yuen, who joined Fangda from Freshfields in 2012), it was not until the late 2010s when partners from elite UK or US firms began to move to PRC firms, a trend likely to continue after the recent turning point of 2019-2020, when the anti-extradition bill protests and China’s subsequent imposition of a National Security Law on Hong Kong led to the exodus of Western clients and made PRC firms more appealing options for practicing law in Hong Kong.

The Top-Down View: In and Out of the Magic Circle

To further examine the effects of waves, cycles, and turning points on professional flows, we zoom in on the very top of the law firm ecology in Hong Kong, that is, the five Magic Circle firms from London, and examine the lateral moves of partners in and out of them. Although the elite cycle of professional flows discussed above includes not only those five firms but also other UK and US firms, as well as several Hong Kong, PRC, and Australian firms in

different periods, the Magic Circle firms are still among the most prestigious firms in the ecology even after two decades of the 1997 handover. The two waves of professional flows to elite US and PRC firms since the late 2000s have added more competition to the Magic Circle firms and weakened their market positions, but they have not fundamentally altered their status in the ecology (HK1802; HK1809). Therefore, an investigation on the professional flows in and out of the Magic Circle firms provides a good top-down lens for understanding the dynamics of change in the corporate legal sector in Hong Kong.

All the five Magic Circle firms established their Hong Kong offices in the British colonial era. In 1995, Clifford Chance had 14 partners and 93 fee earners in Hong Kong, Allen & Overy had 12 partners and 60 fee earners, Linklaters had 10 partners and 57 fee earners, Freshfields had 10 partners and 49 fee earners, and Slaughter & May had 8 partners and 27 fee earners (New Gazette 1995). All were among the 25 largest law firms in Hong Kong before the 1997 handover, arguably the most prestigious ones. Traditionally, the Magic Circle firms adopted the “Cravath System” that promoted their partners internally and lateral moves were scarce (Galanter and Roberts 2008). From 1994 to 2000, there were only 8 partners who joined the Magic Circle and 3 partners who left. Lateral moves between Magic Circle firms were also rare in Hong Kong. It was not until 2005 that we observed the first internal move within the Magic Circle in our dataset, when a partner joined Linklaters from Clifford Chance.

----- Table 4 about here -----

Table 4 presents all the lateral moves of partners in and out of the Magic Circle firms from our dataset. For the outflow of partners, the turning point of the 2008 global financial crisis

was significant. In the 15 years from 1994 to 2008, 11 partners left the Magic Circle, and 4 partners moved from one Magic Circle firm to another. Only 4 of the 11 outgoing partners joined US firms. By contrast, 35 partners moved out of Magic Circle firms from 2009 to 2018. Among them, only 2 partners joined other Magic Circle firms and 24 moved to US firms. Notably, Latham & Watkins received 7 partners from Allen & Overy in 2009, 2 partners from Freshfields in 2014-2015, and one partner from Clifford Chance in 2016. Davis Polk received 4 partners from Freshfields, Linklaters, and Clifford Chance during 2010-2013. Other Wall Street firms like Simpson Thacher, Skadden, Sullivan & Cromwell, and Paul Weiss also gained partners from the Magic Circle in the same period.

This wave of partner moves from the Magic Circle to Wall Street firms was precisely the “big earthquake” (HK1814) that one of our interviewees mentioned above. Another partner who moved to an elite US firm from a Magic Circle firm in that wave explained the competitive pressure among US firms at the time:

When I was at [a Magic Circle firm], Davis Polk was on the US side and ... because they didn't have a Hong Kong law practice, they would have to give up the client relationship. ... They also recognized that it had reached a point where both the mainland corporate clients and also to a certain extent the international financial institution clients and the PE [private equity] clients and so on were wanting Hong Kong law service or sort of one-stop shop. So they recognized they would either have to make the commitment to do that or leave. ... And also it became a competitive thing that, once Davis Polk did it, Simpson [Thacher] thought they had

to do it and once Davis Polk and Simpson [Thacher] did it ... that created competitive pressure. (HK1809)

The neo-institutionalist logic of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) was at work in elite US firms' expansion in Hong Kong. While many of them already recognized the importance of IPOs and other cross-border transactional work for mainland Chinese clients in Hong Kong in the mid-2000s, such work became particularly attractive after the 2008 global financial crisis. As this quote suggests, competitive pressure among elite Wall Street firms was a major driving force behind this wave of partner poaching from the Magic Circle. Many partners joined US firms because of their higher compensation than the Magic Circle firms, and some also preferred the managerial simplicity of US firms. As one partner commented, "In UK firms, there are too many titles, sectors, practice groups, writing business plans." (HK1814) By contrast, US firms generally are less bureaucratic and offer their partners more autonomy. Many of these partners were mid-career lawyers when they moved out of the Magic Circle. Because of the lockstep system of partner remuneration in the Magic Circle firms, which usually plateaus after 10 years of partnership, moving out at this career stage to a US firm provided these lawyers an opportunity to further elevate their income and status in the profession.

How did the Magic Circle firms respond to the aggressive invasion of Wall Street firms into their traditional turfs in Hong Kong? Take Freshfields, which lost 10 partners to other firms from 2010 to 2015. This massive exodus of partners generated some replacement hiring activities, as 3 partners joined Freshfields laterally from Herbert Smith, Orrick, and Linklaters in 2013-2015. However, it was far more modest than what the vacancy chain model would predict. Similarly, after losing 7 partners to Latham & Watkins in 2009, followed by the exodus of 5

additional partners to other US and UK firms in 2012-2015, Allen & Overy did not recruit any new partner from outside until 2016. There was little vacancy chain effect. Rather, these Magic Circle firms promoted their own associates to fill in the gap. It confirms a finding of Tan and Rider (2017) on lateral hiring in US law firms, that is, losing employees to high-status competitors can potentially enhance a firm's status in the labor market.

Even when the Magic Circle firms received lateral partners, the sending firms were usually other UK firms (e.g., Herbert Smith and Ashurst) or US firms not headquartered in New York (e.g., Morrison & Foerster, Baker & McKenzie, and Orrick). Almost no partner who joined elite Wall Street firms like Davis Polk or Paul Weiss flowed back to the Magic Circle afterward. Instead, they either stayed in the same firm or moved to another elite US firm. For instance, Michael Swee-long Liu, a senior partner of Allen & Overy who led the 7-partner team to join Latham & Watkins in 2009, moved on to Cadwalader, another Wall Street firm, in 2015. Cadwalader, however, closed its Hong Kong office in 2017 and Mr. Liu retired from his legal practice. Chun Fai Woo, another Allen & Overy partner who joined Latham & Watkins in 2009, proceeded to join Orrick in 2011, Freshfields in 2013 before returning to Latham & Watkins in 2015. In 2018, Mr. Woo left Latham & Watkins again to join his father's law firm K. Y. Woo & Co.

Such "serial lateral movers" like Mr. Woo are rare in our dataset, but their career trajectories are indicators of the directions of professional flows in the cycle of lateral moves among elite UK and US firms. Another good case in point is Koon Ying Chow, the first partner who moved from Slaughter & May, a Magic Circle firm known for its resistance to lateral hiring, to Linklaters in 2006. In 2011, Mr. Chow joined Davis Polk from Linklaters and stayed there until 2019, when he became the General Counsel of Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. Martin David

Rogers, who joined Clifford Chance from Herbert Smith in 2002, moved to Davis Polk in 2013. Antony Dapiran, a corporate lawyer who is also a part-time writer and an outspoken advocate for Hong Kong's democracy movement, moved from Freshfields to Davis Polk as a partner in 2010 and then to Skadden as Of Counsel in 2017.

The mobility of these high-profile partners in the elite cycle not only shows a general direction toward Wall Street firms but also an important feature of professional flows, that is, professionals may change their firm affiliations, yet their work largely remains the same. As one of our interviewees who moved from a Magic Circle firm to a Wall Street firm put it, "My practice didn't change much. I'm still doing similar deals, but ... focus on revenue collection." (HK1814) Another partner who had a similar career trajectory also expressed this view, "But the whole time my practice has been the same, which has mainly been Hong Kong IPOs and Hong Kong capital markets and Hong Kong stock exchange." (HK1809) In other words, there is a logic of elite circulation in professional flows beyond the vacancy chain of firm positions. A professional service firm may lose a partner to another firm, yet that partner can still maintain her practice and often her clients. Consequently, the rise and fall of individual firms do not necessarily alter the landscape of work in a professional service market.

Indeed, if we switch from ecology back to firm as the unit of analysis, then the landscape of the Hong Kong legal services market had changed substantially from 1994 to 2018. As a senior partner who has practiced in Hong Kong since the 1990s commented:

When I came to Hong Kong, the biggest firms were Baker & McKenzie, JSM, Deacons, and Coudert Brothers. The Magic Circle firms were not that big in Hong Kong in 1995. But then capital market exploded. Big IPOs took people big time.

Some US & UK firms came and gone. US firms paid more than the UK ones. Some US firms like Fried Frank gone, some downsized. ... When I was interviewed by UK and US law firms, I asked them, “Are you profitable?” The partners said, “Yes, but...” ... The Magic Circle firms continue to play a strong role in Hong Kong because their clients are the US investment banks. Those firms that stay have niched practices, strong capital, or a strong client. Chinese firms, without PRC clients, face difficulty surviving too. The China landscape has changed so much. (HK1804)

One notable feature of the changing landscape that this partner described is increased competition among not only the Magic Circle and Wall Street firms but a wider range of firms from different jurisdictions and social origins. As another partner commented, “Now there are some deals where literally you’re competing with the whole world. You’re competing with the US firms, the Magic Circle and Silver Circle UK firms, the Chinese firms, the Hong Kong firms... There’s a lot of competition.” (HK1809) Less profitable firms, including a few elite US firms, closed their Hong Kong offices in recent years as a result of heated market competition. Once an office is closed, its partners would move to other firms and contribute to the elite cycle of professional flows observed in our data.

Overall, this top-down analysis of the professional flows in and out of the Magic Circle firms in Hong Kong suggests that elite reproduction in the professional service market is characterized by not only status competition between firms but also the endogenous circulation of elite professionals within an elite cycle, regardless of the particular composition of firms within that cycle of lateral moves. As partners moved from the Magic Circle firms to the Wall Street firms and elsewhere in the 2010s, this wave of lateral hiring added more firms to the elite

cycle and, in that process, reproduced the elite status of the Magic Circle in a larger and more competitive market.

Conclusion

Compared to nation-states or business corporations, professions are more liquid social entities that flow and transform over space and time. An important yet understudied social process that shapes the history of the legal profession is the mobility of lawyers across geographic locations and firm settings. In this article, we have examined the lateral moves of law firm partners in Hong Kong during 1994-2018 and developed a conceptual framework for analyzing professional flows based on this empirical case. The 25-year history of lawyer mobility in Hong Kong was characterized by two *turning points* of the 1997 handover and the 2008 global financial crisis, a *wave* of partner moves toward US firms after 2008, and the emergence of an elite Anglo-American *cycle* of lateral moves in the law firm ecology. Although the range of our data ends in 2018, the analysis also provides conceptual and empirical tools for future research that analyzes the third turning point of the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ongoing wave of partner moves toward “Red Circle” PRC law firms (Zhu et al. 2020).

For the study of professional service firms, this article offers an ecological and processual perspective for understanding elite reproduction in these firms. Whereas most existing research on the professional elite focuses on social closure, partnership tournament, or capital conversion (Abel 1989; Galanter and Palay 1991; Dinovitzer and Garth 2007; Ashley and Empson 2017), we have outlined an alternative approach that examines the lateral moves of partners across elite firms and how these moves reproduce elite status and change the landscape

of professional services. By changing the unit of analysis from firms to the ecology of firms, this study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that conceptualizes professional service firms not as collegial or bureaucratic organizations (Nelson 1981; Lazega 2001; Flood 2013) but as fluid, dynamic social entities constituted by their mutual interactions and the flows of professionals through them (Liu and Wu 2016; Rider and Tan 2015; Carnahan et al. 2021). Although professional flows in Hong Kong are arguably more frequent and diverse than most other cities and jurisdictions across the world, waves, cycles, and turning points are general conceptual tools for understanding the mobility of professionals across firms in the global history of professions.

Finally, this article provides a unique window for observing the economic change and stability in Hong Kong after the 1997 handover, as this postcolonial city embraced the market opportunities brought by Chinese capital amid periods of political uncertainty. A notable finding of our study is that the massive inflow of Chinese capital into Hong Kong in the early 21st century did not lead to the large-scale entry of PRC law firms until the 2010s. Instead, it consolidated the elite positions of the Magic Circle firms and brought the Wall Street firms into Hong Kong. As a result, elite UK and US law firms dominated the high-end legal services market and benefitted substantially from serving Chinese corporate clients. This alliance between Chinese capital and Anglo-American professional service firms has provided a key foundation for Hong Kong's economic growth since 1997, yet its stability is surely to be tested as the city enters its third decade under China's authoritarian rule. Another turning point may generate new waves and break old cycles, but the professions never cease to flow.

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Table 1. Top 10 firms with the highest outdegree and indegree centrality in three periods.

		Period 1 (1994-2000)			Period 2 (2001-2008)			Period 3 (2009-2018)		
Outdegree Centrality	1	Woo & Woo	HK	10	Dentons	HK	10	King & Wood	CH	22
	2	Yam & Co	HK	9	Deacons	HK	9	Mallesons Stephen Jaques	RW	17
	3	Johnson Stokes & Master	HK	8	Siao, Wen & Leung	HK	9	DLA Piper	UK	15
	4	Fairbairn Catley Low & Kong	HK	7	K F Wong & Co	HK	9	Jones Day	US	11
	5	Siao, Wen & Leung	HK	6	Johnson Stokes & Master	HK	8	Freshfields	UK	11
	6	Cheng, Yeung & Co	HK	6	Simmons & Simmons	UK	8	Clyde & Co	UK	10
	7	Aggarwal & Associates	RW	6	Yip, Tse & Tang	HK	8	Allen & Overy	UK	9
	8	Hampton, Winter & Glynn	HK	5	Fairbairn Catley Low & Kong	HK	7	Haley & Co	US	9
	9	Vincent T K Cheung Yap & Co	HK	5	CMS Cameron Mckenna	UK	7	Orrick	US	9
	10	Or, Ng & Chan	HK	5	Baker & McKenzie	US	6*	Clifford Chance	UK	8**
Indegree Centrality	1	Pun & Associates	HK	9	DLA Piper	UK	12	King & Wood Mallesons	CH	30
	2	Preston Gates & Ellis	US	7	Koo & Partners	HK	9	Latham & Watkins	US	14
	3	Alfred Lam, Keung & Co	HK	7	Jones Day	US	8	Stephenson Harwood	UK	13
	4	Horvath & Giles	HK	7	Lily Fenn & Partners	HK	7	Howse Williams Bowers	HK	13
	5	Deacons	HK	6	Huen Wong & Co	HK	7	DLA Piper	UK	11
	6	Kong, Wan, So & Cheng	HK	5	Simmons & Simmons	UK	6	Clyde & Co	UK	10
	7	Wong & Yip	HK	5	White & Case	US	6	Mayer Brown JSM	US	10
	8	Koo & Partners	HK	5	Heller Ehrman	US	6	Norton Rose	UK	10
	9	Coudert Brothers	US	5	Mallesons Stephen Jaques	RW	6	Kirkland & Willis	US	9
	10	Linklaters	UK	5	Jewkes Chan & Partners	HK	6	Keith Lam, Lau & Chan	HK	8

Notes: * The following firms have the same outdegree centrality (6): Baker & Mckenzie (US), Chan, Leung & Cheung (HK), DLA Piper (UK), Fong & Ng (HK), Heller Ehrman (US), and White & Case (US). ** The following firms have the same outdegree centrality (8): Clifford Chance (UK), Barlow Lyde & Gilbert (UK), Linklaters (UK), and King & Wood Mallesons (CH).

Table 2. Lateral moves between firms from five types of jurisdictions, 1994-2018.

		Receiving Firms				
		HK	UK	US	CH	RW
Sending Firms	HK	867	42	63	7	11
	UK	80	80	53	3	7
	US	57	34	67	0	5
	CH	15	5	1	13	0
	RW	14	13	9	15	3

Notes: HK: Hong Kong; UK: Britain; US: United States; CH: Mainland China; RW: Rest of the World

Table 3. Lateral moves between firms from five types of jurisdictions, 1994-2000, 2001-2008, 2009-2018.

1994—2000			Receiving Firms				
			HK	UK	US	CH	RW
Sending Firms	HK	371	15	12	0	4	
	UK	21	8	2	0	2	
	US	3	1	1	0	0	
	CH	0	0	0	0	0	
	RW	7	4	6	0	1	
2000—2008			Receiving Firms				
			HK	UK	US	CH	RW
Sending Firms	HK	282	9	21	0	5	
	UK	22	32	8	0	4	
	US	14	4	16	0	0	
	CH	0	0	0	0	0	
	RW	3	4	2	0	2	
2009—2018			Receiving Firms				
			HK	UK	US	CH	RW
Sending Firms	HK	212	18	30	7	2	
	UK	37	39	43	3	1	
	US	40	29	50	0	5	
	CH	15	5	1	13	0	
	RW	4	5	1	15	0	

Notes: HK: Hong Kong; UK: Britain; US: United States; CH: Mainland China; RW: Rest of the World

Table 4. Lateral moves in and out of the five Magic Circle firms.

	Sending Firms	Year	Receiving Firms	Year
Allen & Overy	Stevenson, Wong & Co (2) Barlow Lyde & Gilbert CMS Cameron McKenna Baker & McKenzie Norton Rose Norton Rose Fulbright Ashurst (2)	1995 2000 2002 2003 2008 2016 2017	Eric Ho & Co Bird & Bird Linklaters Latham & Watkins (7) Ashurst Jones Day Morrison & Foerster Linklaters Milbank	1999 2002 2006 2009 2012 2012 2012 2013 2015
Clifford Chance	Minter Ellison Simmons & Simmons Herbert Smith Johnson Stokes & Master (2) Mayer Brown JSM Woo, Kwan, Lee & Lo	1994 2000 2002 2008 2013 2017	Morrison & Foerster White & Case Weil, Gotshall & Manges Linklaters Mallesons Stephen Jaques Richards Butler Mallesons Stephen Jaques Davis Polk (2) Latham & Watkins	2000 2003 2004 2005 2006 2006 2010 2013 2016
Freshfields	Johnson Stokes & Master Mallesons Stephen Jaques Herbert Smith Orrick Linklaters	1999 2002 2013 2013 2015	Allen & Overy Arthur Marriott & Associates Clayton Utz Davis Polk Skadden Simpson Thacher Sullivan & Cromwell Fangda/Peter Yuen & Associates Hogan Lovells Latham & Watkins Latham & Watkins Weil, Gotshal & Manges Fangda/Peter Yuen & Associates	2006 2008 2010 2010 2011 2011 2011 2012 2014 2014 2015 2015 2018
Linklaters	Hasting & Co Allens Arthur Robinson Baker & McKenzie Clifford Chance Allen & Overy Slaughter & May Morrison & Foerster Allen & Overy Baker & McKenzie Herbert Smith	1997 1998 2001 2005 2006 2006 2011 2013 2013 2014	Shearman & Sterling Lo & Co Malleson Stephen Jaques Roger Ho & Co Davis Polk Simpson Thacher Freshfields White & Case Paul Weiss Ashurst	2000 2003 2005 2010 2011 2011 2015 2015 2016 2017
Slaughter & May	Morrison & Foerster	2014	Linklaters Eversheds	2006 2010

Figure 1. All and lateral moves of law firm partners in Hong Kong, 1994-2018.

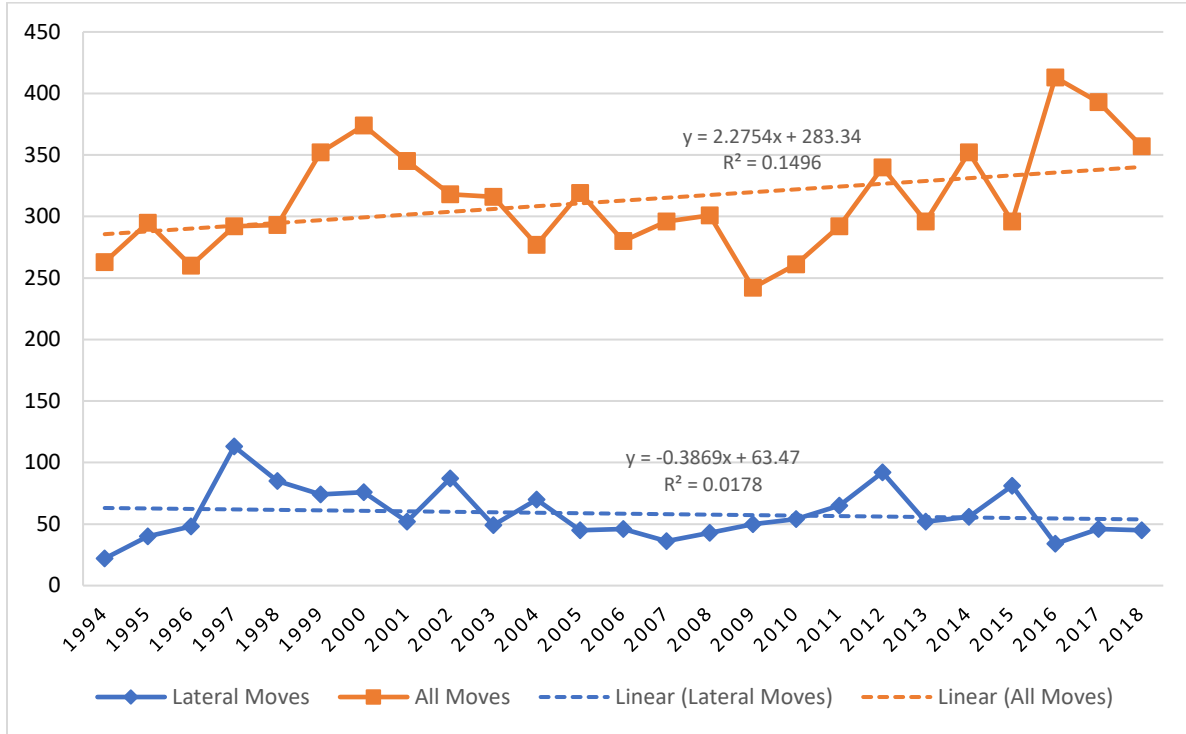
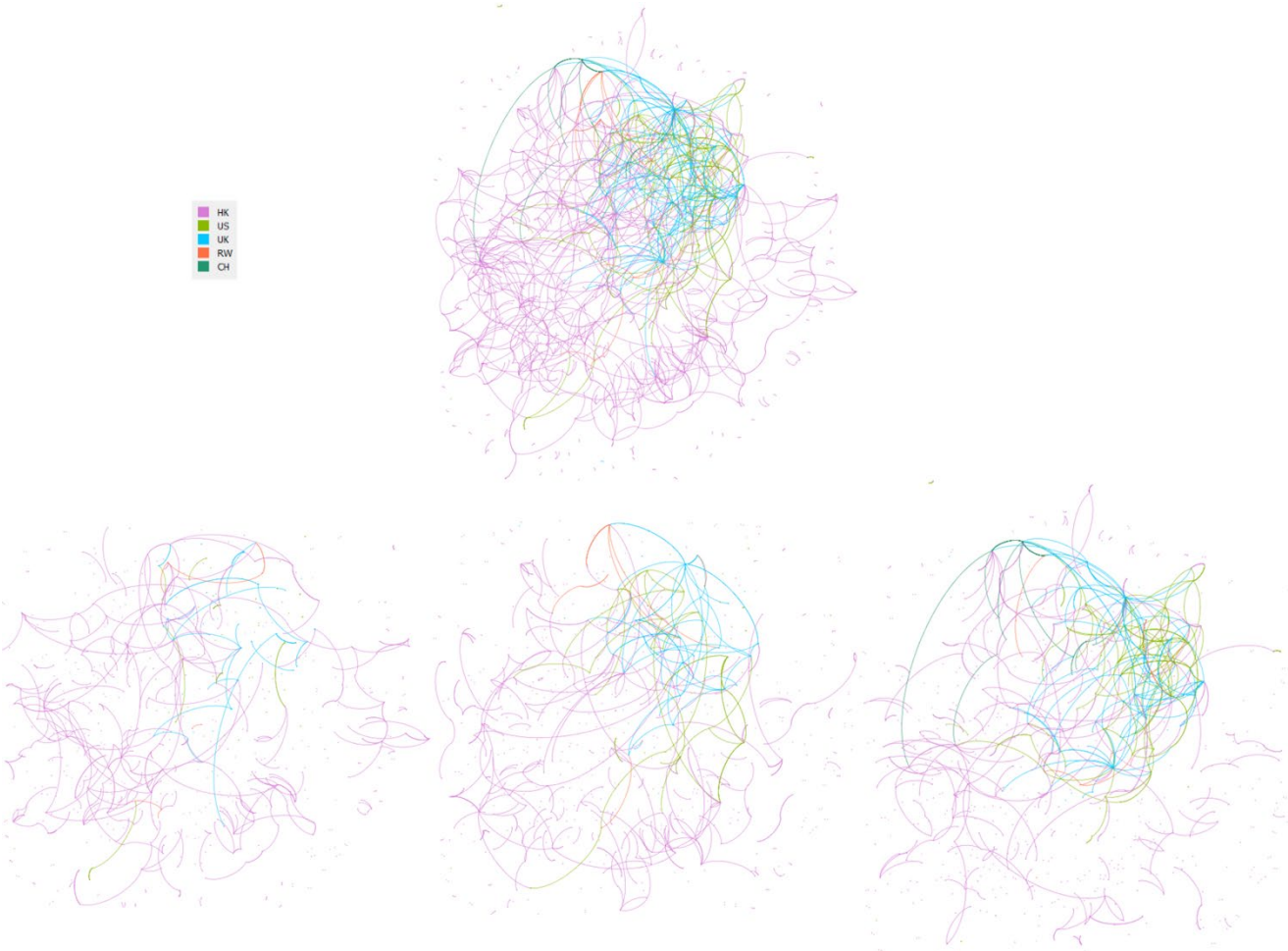


Figure 2. Network structures of lateral moves in 1994-2018 and three periods.



Note: Top row is all years (1994-2018) aggregated. Bottom row is, in order, 1994-2000, 2001-2008, 2009-2018