

GEOGRAPHIES OF CULTURAL CAPITAL:  
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, CIRCULAR MIGRATION AND FAMILY  
STRATEGIES BETWEEN CANADA AND HONG KONG

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines recent patterns of global student mobility through the investigation of an emergent map of 'international education' and the related socio-spatial strategies underpinning the contemporary transnational migration of students and their families between Canada and Hong Kong. It is particularly concerned with uncovering the symbolic meanings and practical implications of 'foreign educational credentials' for East Asian families; 'education' is conceived in terms of 'cultural capital' and is found to be intimately related to broader capital accumulation strategies amongst households seeking to reproduce their middle-class status in contemporary Hong Kong. Research was conducted in Vancouver and Hong Kong, including in-depth interviews with current immigrant students and returnee graduates. The thesis explores some of the main facets of education as geographically differentiated cultural capital and demonstrates also the central role of embedded social relations ('social capital') in the valuation of credentials. Broadly, it seeks to elucidate the relationship between the recent internationalisation of education in particular countries, trends in the long-distance spatial mobility of students from East Asia, and family strategies of capital accumulation and social class reproduction.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **EDUCATION, MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CLASS IN EAST ASIA**

*'[N]ot one but two species of capital now give access to positions of power, define the structure of social space, and govern the life chances and trajectories of groups and individuals: economic capital and cultural capital.'* (Wacquant 1996, p.x)

In May 2003, a special issue of *Time* magazine on 'Education in Asia' described a popular trend amongst expectant parents in South Korea, the 'package childbirth tour', destined for the United States. For a sum of US\$20,000, travel agencies will provide parents with 'airport transfers, an apartment to live in before and after the delivery, medical treatment at clinics catering to Koreans, sightseeing and assistance in getting a birth certificate and passport for the newborn' (Ko 2003). At eight-and-a-half months pregnant, 'Young Jin' was making the twelve-hour journey from South Korea to the United States alone. When asked why, her response was emphatic - to save her unborn child from 'Korea's hellish school system' (Ko 2003).

Dr. Kim Chang Kyu, an obstetrician practicing in one of Seoul's wealthier neighbourhoods, estimates that every year thousands of women are going overseas to give birth, returning to South Korea shortly after. Arugus Lee, the CEO of Hana Medical Center in Los Angeles, which delivers at least five babies from Korean visitors every month, attributes these circumstances to a concern with 'education'. 'The US State Department isn't crazy about the trend, but tourist visas are given freely to well-heeled Koreans who don't appear to be illegal alien risks', writes Ko (2003). They are coming 'not to migrate but to get their children the document that, 17 years hence, might allow

them a shot at a place in a US university.’ The author then explains: ‘Koreans are education zealots, partly because of a Confucian tradition but also because a degree from a top university is a passport to status and a comfortable life. The problem is that *getting into good Korean universities has become so competitive that parents are going great distances* to let their kids avoid the whole stressful mess. The favorite ticket is to get them American citizenship, which is guaranteed to anyone born on US soil’ (Ko 2003, emphasis added).

In East Asia, the widespread perception that employers in fact *favour* graduates of ‘overseas’ universities is fuelled by local media reports. Articles in the *South China Morning Post* <sup>1</sup> frequently emphasise the inadequacies of Asia’s educational systems alongside the observation that locally educated graduates find themselves shut out of the most coveted jobs. In one report, unambiguously entitled ‘Overseas degree may open the door to top jobs’, a personnel consultant at a local employment agency was quoted as saying: “It is true that many employers prefer overseas graduates to locals, especially for jobs that deal with people, like marketing, insurance, human resources, or public relations” (Lee 2001). In another, a consultant with HR Business Solutions Asia made the same emphatic point: ‘multinational corporations’ have an overt preference for the ‘overseas educated’ to the detriment of locals (Fenton 2003). International law firms are reportedly ‘throwing out up to 75 percent of resumes from Hong Kong-trained graduates [...] and are increasingly looking overseas to fill the posts’ (Moir 2000), whilst Hong Kong graduates with *overseas exchange* experience can expect to earn around HK\$13,000 more than those without it (Yeung 2003). <sup>2</sup> The problems faced by local

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<sup>1</sup> SCMP is Hong Kong’s foremost English language daily newspaper.

<sup>2</sup> This is according to a survey of 1, 800 graduates between 1999 and 2001 (Yeung 2003).



business-school graduates described here by Hui (2003) are, it would seem, commonplace in Hong Kong:

‘Steve DeKrey, MBA programme director at the HKUST [Hong Kong University of Science and Technology], said it was the business school’s ‘biggest headache’ to convince multinationals to assess their graduates on the same footing as their counterparts from renowned overseas universities. ‘It has a lot to do with corporate bureaucracy. Much of the firms’ hiring is done through their connections with business schools or alumni groups in their home countries,’ he said.’ (Hui 2003)

Aihwa Ong (1999) is one of the few academics to have explicitly addressed the issue of the ‘overseas education’ in the context of contemporary Asia. She has written:

‘Indeed, for many middle-class Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, the ultimate symbolic capital necessary for global mobility is the American college degree, which guarantees that the holder has acquired the cultural knowledge, skills, and credentials that enable the transposition of social status from one country to another’ (p. 90).

‘[T]he deliberate acquisition of cultural capital is very common indeed. It starts with parents sending their children to the “right” school and inculcating in them the “correct” foreign language, academic interests and social behaviour.’ (p. 91).

For Ong, the ‘overseas (particularly North American) degree’ is an important symbol of status and achievement, coveted by a contemporary Chinese business elite who are also transnational, ‘hypermobile’, and cosmopolitan in outlook and lifestyle (Ong and Nonini 1997, Skeldon 1997, Mitchell 1997a, 1997b). It is an essential part of what Mitchell (1997b) has described as a ‘self-fashioning’ process; undertaken by East Asia’s middle-class families seeking inculcation in the ‘language of the global economic subject’ (Mitchell 1997b, p. 551), the overseas education indicates possession of a whole host of cultural, embodied traits conducive to entrepreneurial success in a global economic arena

(ibid). And yet, these depictions would seem to sit uneasily alongside the claim that, in Korea at least, going overseas for education is perceived as a means of *escaping* a highly competitive and difficult local academic environment, providing an *easier* route to a university place (Gluck 2001, Ko 2003).

These examples introduce some of the key issues around mobility and the ‘overseas education’ in contemporary East Asia. They also highlight an apparently paradoxical situation, ignored by existing scholarship, and yet starkly present in my own research data; an overseas education is at once a *way out* of a highly competitive local system as well as a *more valuable* form of cultural capital for migrant students. I highlight this in the following account derived from my own interviews with ‘overseas-educated’ graduates in Hong Kong.

Natalie works as a human resources consultant for a multinational firm. She was born in Hong Kong in 1974, and was educated in the local school system up to ‘Form Four’ (‘Grade Nine’), when she moved to Vancouver on a student visa. She stayed, initially, with her uncle (“I consider him a Canadian”), who had immigrated ten years previously; her extended family is widely dispersed, living in the US, Australia and Malaysia as well as Canada. Here she explains the reasons - and particularly the *timing* - of her move to Canada:

**Natalie:** The critical point was probably Form Five in Hong Kong where you need to take the Hong Kong certificate examination [HKCEE]. It was well known to be a disaster for every student! So at the moment of Form Three or Form Four I proposed to my parents, saying ‘if I can get a chance to get out of Hong Kong so I don’t need to take the HKCEE at Form Five...’ So at the end of the day they said ‘OK, as long as you can apply for college, high school’, I should go there and experience new things etc. So... through the Vancouver School Board I took some exams and then [an] interview and then I was admitted to Lord Byng High School in Vancouver. So it was like that. So

**actually the motive was kind of like a lazy person who really doesn't want to take the exam, because it was well known to be very disastrous. Some people [committed] suicide after the report cards [were published], because that's actually the borderline between life and death. If you don't have really good marks there is no secondary school that will admit you into Form Six where there's the preparation for the university. So that's an important examination. And my parents have given me enough funding for the whole six years so I don't really need to take any scholarship or anything.**

Natalie majored successfully in statistics at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and graduated in 1996. She explains her own experiences of returning to Hong Kong to seek employment:

**When he [her boss in Hong Kong] saw my CV he said, 'oh, this is very good. You graduated from the University of British Columbia.' It is a very well known, famous U in Canada. So he will make that kind of impression.**

She went on to say:

**At my time for local people to get into UBC it's not very difficult, so if you can't get into UBC that means you are quite bad! *Laughs*. I think it is definitely more difficult to get into Hong Kong U [where] you need very good marks in different subjects...**

Other research participants – both current immigrant students and returnee graduates – depicted a common experience of failure or expected failure in a highly competitive Hong Kong school system, prompting their emigration and that of their families. The claim that the HKCEE has 'life and death' implications was not exceptional. At the same time, they consistently expressed the belief that employers prefer overseas graduates and that the overseas degree is, therefore, inherently more valuable than a degree conferred by a university in Hong Kong. The contradictory nature of these claims is evident.

Whilst Aihwa Ong (1999) has argued convincingly that an overseas, North American education represents the 'ultimate symbolic capital' for middle-class Chinese students and their families, she does not address this issue of failure. Her analysis is limited by the fact that it omits a number of important contextual details, such as that of heightened academic competition through the democratisation of public education in East Asia, and the notion that middle-class families are increasingly dependent upon academic credentials for the social reproduction of their class status (Brown 1995, Bourdieu 1996, Brown et al. 1997, Ball 2003) at the same time as recent economic restructuring has destabilised the career paths of graduates in certain East Asian countries (Beaverstock and Doel 2001). Nor does she sufficiently theorise the social class implications of the overseas education; how mobility, educational 'choice' and the reproduction of class status are inextricably linked.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1996) provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the symbolic and practical functions of education in advanced industrial societies. He has suggested how the existing social order may be reproduced and legitimated through education; academic credentials are conceived in terms of 'cultural capital', facilitating access to money and status through jobs and other opportunities. It is therefore: 'necessary to bury the myth of the "school as liberating force," guarantor of the triumph of "achievement" over "ascription"... in order to perceive the educational institution in the true light of its social uses, that is, as one of the foundations of domination and of the legitimation of domination.' (Bourdieu 1996, p. 5) Educational qualifications are a key mechanism by which contemporary society is stratified according to social class:

‘With the academic qualification...social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer... It institutes cultural capital by collective magic... the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition.’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248)

With this in mind, this thesis examines the meaning and significance of education for contemporary migration, focussing in particular on the circular flows of students and recent graduates between Hong Kong and Canada. I will argue that, in the context of contemporary East Asia, the ‘overseas education’ exemplifies the institution of ‘cultural capital by collective magic’. I address the paradox outlined above, considering how and why a history of academic failure may be effectively ‘erased’ through emigration, education in Canada, and return, and the social and spatial implications of this process. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide an overview of the broader issues at stake in the contemporary international mobility of students and the wider questions addressed in this thesis.

### **The nexus of international education**

There is an important global context to the international mobility of students. The international market for higher education is estimated to be worth \$30 billion (UNESCO, 2001). There are currently more than 2.1 million students studying abroad, predicted to increase to 5.8 million by 2020 (British Council 2004), providing ‘host’ countries and individual educational institutions with a substantial external source of revenue through tuition fees and other expenditures. Recent changes in immigration policy in several countries reflect the intention of attracting (and keeping) more international students.

Most striking of all, however, is the increasingly entrenched and *highly uneven geography* of this emerging market. Globally, the vast majority of international students choose to study in very specific English-speaking countries, namely the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada (OECD/CERI 2002, British Council 2004).<sup>3</sup> Student origins are equally circumscribed: 53 percent of global demand for international student places in these countries in 2003 came from a small number of countries in Asia, predicted to grow to 71 percent by 2020 (British Council 2004).

Yet, very little scholarship has addressed the links between international population mobility and education in any detail, and virtually none has examined the *geography* of international education including the varied socio-spatial outcomes of these processes. This thesis addresses these omissions on two inextricably related levels, divided here into two principal sections.

### **Outline of chapters in Section One**

Section One provides an institutional perspective on the geography of internationalisation and student mobility. I draw out the implications of the intersection of education and economic globalisation, particularly the widespread implementation of neoliberal ideology, transforming educational policy and practice at multiple spatial scales (Brown et al. 1997, Apple 2000, Burbules and Torres 2000, Magnusson 2000, Morrow and Torres 2000, Mitchell 2003). In chapter 2, I consider the impact of neoliberalism at the international scale, examining how the global spread and standardisation of formal education, at all levels, is inextricably linked to a burgeoning

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<sup>3</sup> The British Council, along with IDP Australia, recently published a report forecasting global demand for international education (2004). In it, they use the term MESDCs to stand for the 'Main English Speaking Destination Countries', namely, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK.

international education industry built upon the ‘differentiation’ of national education systems. I consider the multiple scales at which the internationalisation of education manifests: the role of *supra-national organisations* in coordinating, standardising and ‘ranking’ activities (advocating, for example, global ‘benchmarking’, world best practice in education, and global forms of accreditation), and the activities of *particular countries* (especially the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) in marketing their national education systems to an overseas consumer. The UK, Australia and New Zealand have been recently concerned with educational ‘brand’ development. I ask: how do these activities transform the meaning of education in each of these countries? And what are the implications of these trends for international student mobility? Chapter 3 then focuses this discussion on Canada, at different scales, from national level initiatives to those of provincial governments, district school boards, and individual institutions as they ‘internationalise’ curricula, facilitate educational exchanges, provide distance-learning courses and establish overseas campuses. The intersection of educational provision with economic concerns is clearly evident throughout this analysis. Overall, this section seeks to provide an account and theorisation of international education from the perspective of governments and institutions. It is the first stage in developing an understanding of an emergent, global map of cultural capital, developed and ensconced through the conscious strategies of macro- and meso-scale actors.

## **Outline of chapters in Section Two**

This section of the thesis entails a shift in scale and methodology. Whilst Section One presented the internationalisation of education in terms of large-scale population

movements, institutions, globalising organisations and dominating ideologies, Section Two seeks to provide a detailed exploration of the meanings attached to international education from the perspective of migrant students and their families. The argument of this section is divided into five, interrelated chapters. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of scholarship on the contemporary Chinese diaspora and, more specifically, an argument about the role of *class-based family strategies* in recent migratory patterns. It emphasises the continued deployment of 'the family' in the contemporary creation of a 'neoliberal subject' (Mitchell et al. 2004). Chapter 5 undertakes a critical examination of the concept of 'education', developing a particular approach to understanding credentials and international study. It introduces theories of capital and capital accumulation, and suggests, once again, the salience of family strategies of social class reproduction (Bourdieu 1984, 1986, Brown 1995). Education is conceived as cultural capital, and the education system a means by which middle-class families may propagate their privilege (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Lareau 1987, Brown 1995, Goldthorpe 1996). The link between educational choices, social class, and physical mobility is emphasised (Ball et al 1995, Ball 2003, Butler 2003, Holdsworth 2003) and Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* is briefly discussed. 'Habitus', I suggest, provides a useful means of conceptualising the migration and education strategies of middle-class families. Chapter 6 begins an in-depth empirical analysis, using primary qualitative data obtained through fieldwork in Hong Kong. The key objective of this chapter is to provide the distinctive social-geographical context out of which migration occurs, and within which the symbolic meaning and practical value of the 'overseas degree' are created and sustained. Through the data, I construct a picture of the typical *habitus* or life world of my participants, believing this to



be critical in directing the development of migration intentions. Focussing on Vancouver, chapter 7 examines the strategy and process of migration, looking at the different ways in which families use transnational mobility to access varied global (and local) geographies of capital to their advantage. It specifically considers the acquisition of cultural capital through the experiences of immigrant students, based upon fieldwork in Vancouver. Chapter 8 returns once again to Hong Kong, emphasising the circularity of these students' migration trajectories. The objective here is to provide a detailed empirical examination of the ways in which cultural capital is realised in practice. To this end, it focuses on the *embedded value* of the overseas education, revealed in the specific experiences of returnees, as they participate in the local labour market. In the process of job seeking, the 'value' of the Canadian degree was found to be closely associated with *social capital*, specifically the embedded social relations represented in alumni networks, linking Vancouver and Hong Kong in a transnational circuit of students, graduates and employers.

## **Conclusion**

It is in this context that I have sought to provide a detailed empirical case study of these socio-spatial processes through a qualitative (geographically situated) investigation of the "circular", trans-Pacific migration of students, graduates *and their families* (Ley and Kobayashi 2002). Earlier research (Waters 2000) showed the importance of 'education' in prompting family migration from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In this thesis I examine more fully the place of education in family migration strategies. In-depth interviews with current immigrant students in Vancouver, and 'returnee' graduates in Hong Kong, revealed the symbolic connotations and material consequences of the

‘overseas education’; the way in which it operates as ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1984, 1986), signifying wider familial strategies of social class reproduction and facilitating the success of returnee graduates in the local labour market.

I use primarily qualitative methods, incorporating in-depth interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, archival research and analysis of various government publications and data to address these issues. The idea for this thesis emerged in 1999, when the importance of education in recent migratory flows to Vancouver from East Asia first became apparent.<sup>4</sup> The principal fieldwork was conducted between July 2002 and March 2003 in two locations: British Columbia (Vancouver and Victoria) and Hong Kong, and additional research was carried out at the beginning of 2004 with the help of two assistants at the University of Hong Kong. A fuller discussion of methods and empirical sources will be introduced in subsequent chapters.

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<sup>4</sup> Research conducted for my MA thesis, between 1999 and 2000, has proved invaluable as a starting point for this project (Waters 2000). I was also helped by the research findings and advice of David Ley and Audrey Kobayashi around this time (Ley and Kobayashi 2002).

**INTRODUCTION TO SECTION ONE**  
**GEOGRAPHIES OF STUDENT MOBILITY AND THE**  
**BUSINESS OF CREDENTIALS**

‘The global economy and strategies of competition designed by national governments to invest in the skills of the national workforce, are in effect, the globalisation of the occupational hierarchy...a hierarchy of social advantage seems to be inescapable and equality as opposed to equality of opportunity therefore unobtainable’ (Brown et al. 1997, p. 32).

‘Those pushing a neoliberal agenda in education stress global competitiveness, the reduction of the (publicly-financed) costs of education, and of social reproduction in general, the necessity for greater market choice and accountability, and the imperative to create hierarchically-conditioned, globally-oriented state subjects...’ (Mitchell 2003, p. 388)

This thesis explores emergent, global patterns of student mobility, principally through an investigation of the strategies underlying the transnational migration of students, graduates and their families between Hong Kong and Canada and the role of cultural capital in these movements. It is concerned with understanding the relationship between the diverging, contentious and yet overt ‘value’ attributed to education systems globally as a consequence of neoliberal ideology, the physical mobility of students and the social class determinants and consequences of the propensity to migrate for education.

To this end, Section One provides the broad perspective and the wider institutional and ideological context of student strategies. It examines key aspects of an emergent geography of international education at several spatial scales and considers the major theoretical and empirical questions that arise from these. At the forefront, the *business* of

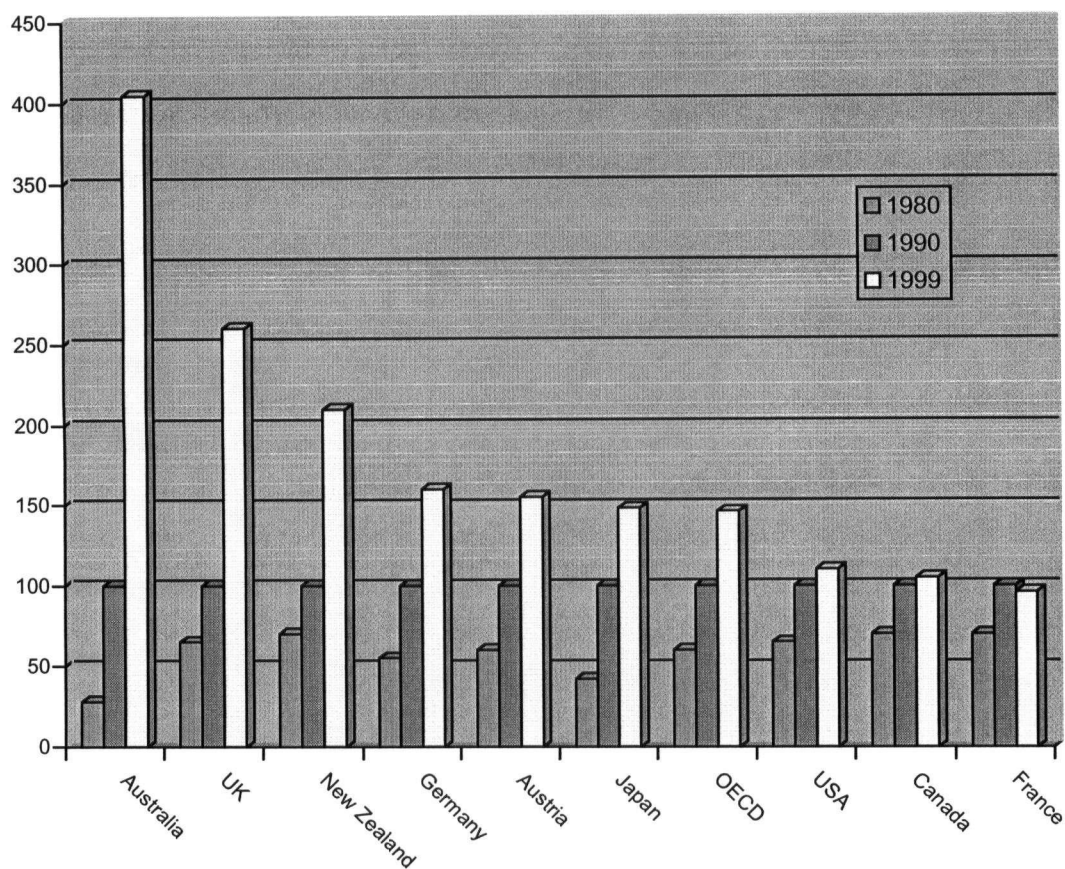
international education is an inescapable, \$100 billion enterprise.<sup>1</sup> It is reflected in the proliferation of language schools, 'satellite' university campuses, the development of distance- or e-learning, international MBA programmes, the 'branding' and marketing of national education systems, and the explicitly entrepreneurial activities of many higher education institutions. Most significantly, it includes the international mobility of 2.1 million tertiary students (British Council 2004) – twice the number of twenty years ago. The spatial patterns of international student mobility are powerful testimony to a fundamentally differentiated global geography of education and, I will argue in Section Two, a varied distribution of cultural capital.

Available statistics point to the fact that 85 percent of international students are found within OECD countries, whilst 56 percent of these originate outside the OECD (OECD/CERI 2002). More than three-quarters of the OECD total are studying in the US, the UK, Germany, France, Australia and Japan (*ibid.*). Figures 1.1 – 1.3 show how the international mobility of students has increased markedly and has generally followed a distinctive geographical pattern: from developing to developed countries, from East to West and from non-English-speaking to English-speaking countries. In 1999, 45 percent of all foreign students studying in OECD countries were primarily from a small number of countries in Asia; China contributed 7 percent of this total (OECD/CERI 2002). These are the general patterns of student mobility. In later chapters I will discuss the particular case of East Asian migration to Canada, and the importance of students within these flows.

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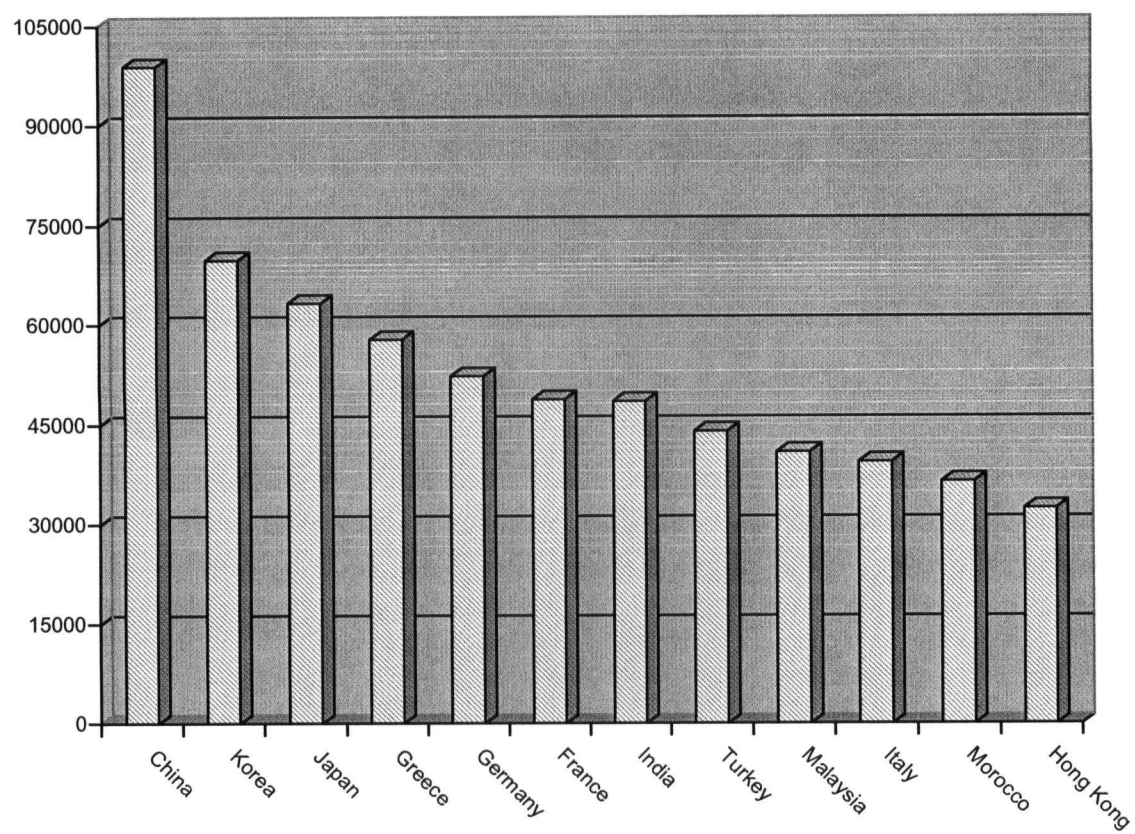
<sup>1</sup> 12 billion dollars of which entered the US economy (*The Economist* 2003)

**Figure 1.1: Increase of Tertiary Foreign Students in OECD countries  
1980 - 1999 (1990 = 100)**



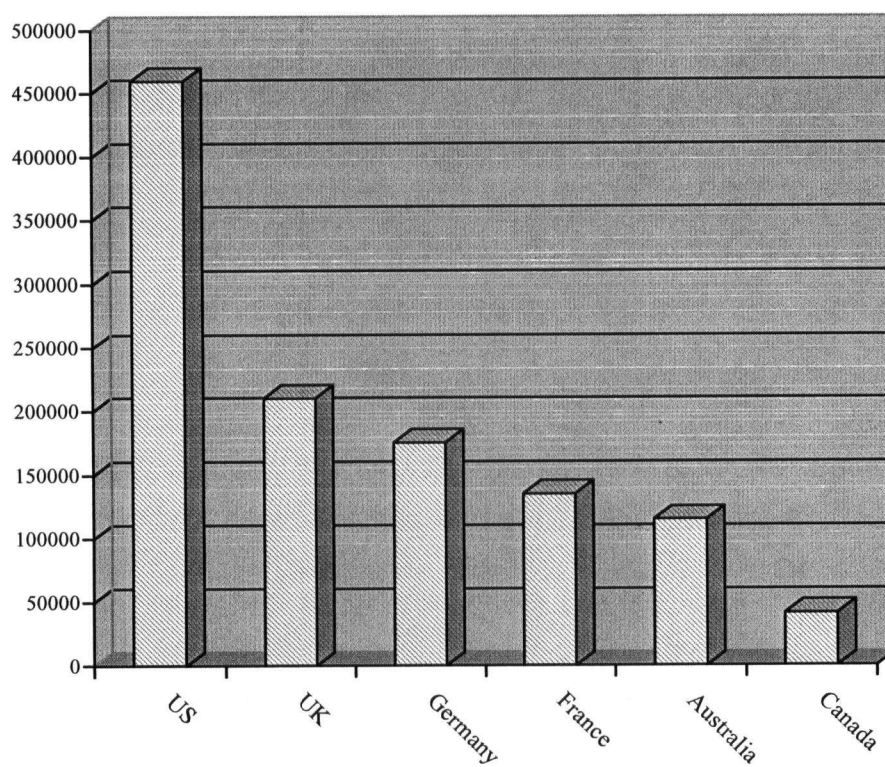
Source of data: OECD/CERI 2002

**Figure 1.2: Number of Tertiary Foreign Students in OECD countries  
(top sending countries) 1999**



Source of data: OECD/CERI 2002

**Figure 1.3: Number of Foreign Students in Tertiary Education in (selected) OECD countries 1999**



Source: OECD/CERI 2002

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **GLOBALISATION, NEOLIBERALISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION**

‘In what respects and to what extent are school systems to be seen to be among the principal agencies of the globalisation process, generating trends towards similar assumptions and structures in curricular, learning objectives, teaching methods and materials...?’ (Gould 2000, pp. 99-100)

‘The defining element in the restructuring of education in Anglophone societies has been the imposition during the 1980s of economic and cultural renewal guided by what has become known as New Right or Neo-Conservative ideology. This ideology guided the administrations of Reagan and Thatcher in the United States and Britain, and is equally influential in New Zealand and parts of Australia and Canada.’...‘The cornerstone of New Right education policy has been the introduction of market competition into all the education sectors.’ (Brown et al. 1997 pp. 19-21)

This thesis advances a theory of geographically differentiated cultural capital, at multiple spatial scales, to account for emergent patterns of global student mobility. The present chapter begins this task by demonstrating the importance of the process of *internationalisation* in education. Whilst the forms and degree of internationalisation are highly uneven and differentiated, it is nevertheless a manifestly significant phenomenon within the education systems of advanced industrial nations in the last fifteen years. I argue that internationalisation indicates dual tendencies towards the standardisation and differentiation of education, at the level of both the national system and the individual institution. This creates the conditions for the emergence of new complex maps of education, and new uneven geographies of cultural capital, as well as new subjectivities



based on new kinds of social experience and new forms of social exclusion (Mitchell 2003, Mitchell et al 2004).<sup>1</sup>

Internationalisation depends upon the global expansion of a certain set of beliefs, related to the importance and necessity of education, schooling and appropriate benchmarks, notably examinations. These, of course, are historically contingent. Yet there are very contemporary forces at work, also, in the spread and implementation of standardised educational practice. This chapter considers the relationship between globalisation, neoliberalism and the recent transformation of public education, with an emphasis on 'marketisation' and the consequent emergence of an *international education industry*, wherein the distinction between 'public' and 'private' sectors has become increasingly blurred.

### **The global expansion of formalised schooling**

'If the western citizen of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a member of a consolidating nation, the contemporary citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a member of a deterritorializing state. How were and are these citizens *educated* to be members of their respective communities?' (Mitchell 2003, p.387)

The contemporary international transformation of education is inextricably linked to the historical growth of formalised schooling and the related development of standardised examination systems. According to Meyer et al. (1992), the principles and practices associated with mass education were apparent in the 'old core' of northern Europe (and some settler societies) prior to 1870. Thereafter, mass education was implemented within

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<sup>1</sup> I am thinking particularly, here, of the kinds of social experience embodied in Ong's (1999) 'flexible citizen', Sklair's (2001) 'transnational capitalist class', Mitchell's (2003) 'strategic cosmopolitan' and Mitchell et al.'s 'neoliberal subject' and the implications for creating new forms of social privilege, excluding the less mobile members of society.

different countries throughout the world at a steady rate, up until the second world war when expansion accelerated as the 'nationally rooted state, secularising earlier religious ideas and institutions, everywhere incorporated mass education as a main enterprise' (Meyer et al. 1992, p. 29). By 1985, over 80 percent of countries worldwide had adopted compulsory education (ibid.), and UNESCO has set the 'deadline' for the achievement of 'universal primary education' at 2015 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2002).<sup>2</sup> The first UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education was held in Paris in 1998 (and the second in 2003), involving participants 'from across the world' (International Association of Universities 2003). The conference helped to enshrine 'internationalism' through the pronouncement of a 'World Declaration' on higher education (ibid.)

It is widely believed that the growth of mass, standardised education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century played a crucial role in the development of the modern nation-state, the expansion of national consciousness and the creation of citizens (Gellner 1983, Benavot et al. 1991, Meyer et al. 1992, Magnusson 2000). This relationship between schooling and society was gradually transformed over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as education systems were increasingly linked to capitalist expansion and national development in a *global* or *transnational* economic context, which included the gradual presence of 'the market' in the funding and delivery of 'public' education (Barrow 1990, Brown 1990, Apple 2000, Burbules and Torres 2000, Gould 2000, Morrow and Torres 2000, Mitchell 2003, UNESCO 2003).

The relatively recent experiences of 'developing' countries are informative, indicating more general tendencies toward internationalisation in education. According to Gould

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<sup>2</sup> Declared at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. 'Education For All' week ran 19<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> April 2004. There are problems, still, with implementing widespread school attendance in some (particularly African) countries.

(2000), in many African countries widespread engagement with the principle of mass schooling began in the 1960s, reflecting the influence of 'modernisation' theory and the belief that education was a necessary condition for 'take-off'. Post-independence and in a spirit of optimism, former colonial countries expanded educational provision at all levels, widening access to secondary schooling as well as creating new public universities. By the 1980s, however, the general absence of tangible results undermined confidence in the potential of mass education for substantial social change and economic development. During this time, supra-national organisations, particularly the IMF and the World Bank, began to exert a significant influence on the education systems of many developing countries. The role of these organisations is particularly germane to the development of an international, globalised system of education (Gould 2000).

Through the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, public expenditure on education decreased, and 'the market' began to intersect with schooling in significant ways:

'for higher levels there has been an encouragement for cost-recovery, 'user-pays' provision, consistent with its [World Bank] ideological commitment to the power of the market rather than the bureaucratic state in the efficient allocation of economic resources' ... "Human Resource Development" is now broadly seen to be more appropriate than 'education': 'training' has acquired rather greater prominence than 'schooling' in the language used (Gould 1993)' (Gould 2000, p. 99).

Gould stresses the dominating influence of UNESCO, the World Bank and the IMF in standardising educational provision, providing, in other words, a 'global view' of formal education.

'It is no surprise, therefore, that the main thrust of international advice on educational development is consistent with policies for 'structural adjustment' – associated with rolling back the role of the state, both indirectly in terms of reducing

the 'interference' of 'the state' in the workings of 'the market', and also directly in the reduction of state expenditures' (Gould 2000, p. 101).

The trends here described, involving a greater role for 'the market' vis-à-vis 'the state' in the funding of public education, are not restricted to the 'developing world'. These same tendencies are to be found in the general process of internationalisation, impacting education systems to a greater or lesser extent globally and thereby creating an international geography of cultural capital.

### **Examinations and credentials**

The expansion of formal education has been accompanied by the implementation and proliferation of standardised testing systems and, as in Collins's (1979) well-known idiom, the institution of a 'credential society.' Writing in the first half of the twentieth century, Weber discussed the development of a 'system of specialized examinations or tests of expertise increasingly indispensable for modern bureaucracies' (1978, p. 999). These are distinct, he argues, from pre-modern examination-based systems (exemplified by Imperial China): 'Only the modern development of full bureaucratization brings the system of rational examinations for expertise irresistibly to the fore' (1978, p. 999). From the 1960s onwards, 'human capital theory' (Becker 1964) has explicitly valorised academic qualifications in both social and economic spheres. Even in Bourdieu's ostensibly oppositional conceptualisation of 'cultural capital', credentials are inescapably salient, constituting a primary form of 'institutionalised cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986). Examinations remain the principal means by which 'education' is transformed into exchangeable capital.

Weber observes, also, the spatial implications of the proliferation of systems of testing, as '[t]he bureaucratisation of capitalism, with its demand for expertly trained technicians, clerks, etc., carries such examinations all over the world' (1978, p. 999/1000). The spatial and social expansion of testing and evaluation has intensified with the internationalisation of education, epitomised in the momentous growth of English language testing,<sup>3</sup> and observed, also, in the various systems of benchmarking and quality assessment conventions implemented by supra-national organisations such as UNESCO.<sup>4</sup> As I will go on to argue, the recent concern with *standardisation* and external assessment serves, in fact, to *differentiate* systems of education, establishing new forms of social disparity globally, with significant local repercussions within the principal 'source' countries of international students.

One further, significant consequence of the global expansion of educational provision is captured in the term 'credential inflation'. Much more will be said about this in chapter 5. For now, suffice to say that, with the dramatic expansion of secondary schooling

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<sup>3</sup> English language testing is now one of the UK's most significant educational exports, which combined are worth £7 billion annually to the British economy (Department of Trade and Industry 2004). All reputable education programmes in the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia require foreign students to pass one of several official measures of English language ability. Every year, 1.5 million people are reported to take the Cambridge exams in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (ESOL 2003). As one of the most prolific tests of English language, an estimated 20 million students have taken the TOEFL since its inception (ETS 2003).

<sup>4</sup> In 2002 UNESCO organised the First Global Forum in International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Paris). Examples of UNESCO conventions include: Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico City, 19 July 1974, Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region, Paris, 21 December 1979, Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States, Arusha (Tanzania), 5 December 1981, Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 16 December 1983, Convention on Technical and Vocational Education, Paris, 10 November 1989, Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (jointly with the Council of Europe), Lisbon, 11 April 1997

globally, academic selection has inevitably shifted towards higher levels of post-secondary education. As Halsey here describes:

‘Before the Second World War the main European preoccupation with educational equity was focused on entry to secondary schools. This was the decisive point of selection in traditional education systems [...] But in the past two or three decades, with secondary schooling becoming universal, attention has perforce shifted onto entry to higher education or, more accurately, entry into some form of post-compulsory schooling, a stage of mass tending to universal provision, whether classified as training or further or higher education. Crucial selection now occurs at the transition out of secondary education. The underlying idea of meritocratic society gives tertiary schooling a new significance.’ (1993, p. 129)

In several countries, more than 50 percent of 18 – 30 year olds now enter tertiary education (figure 2.1)<sup>5</sup>, necessitating post-graduate credentials for academic distinction as a consequence of credential inflation.

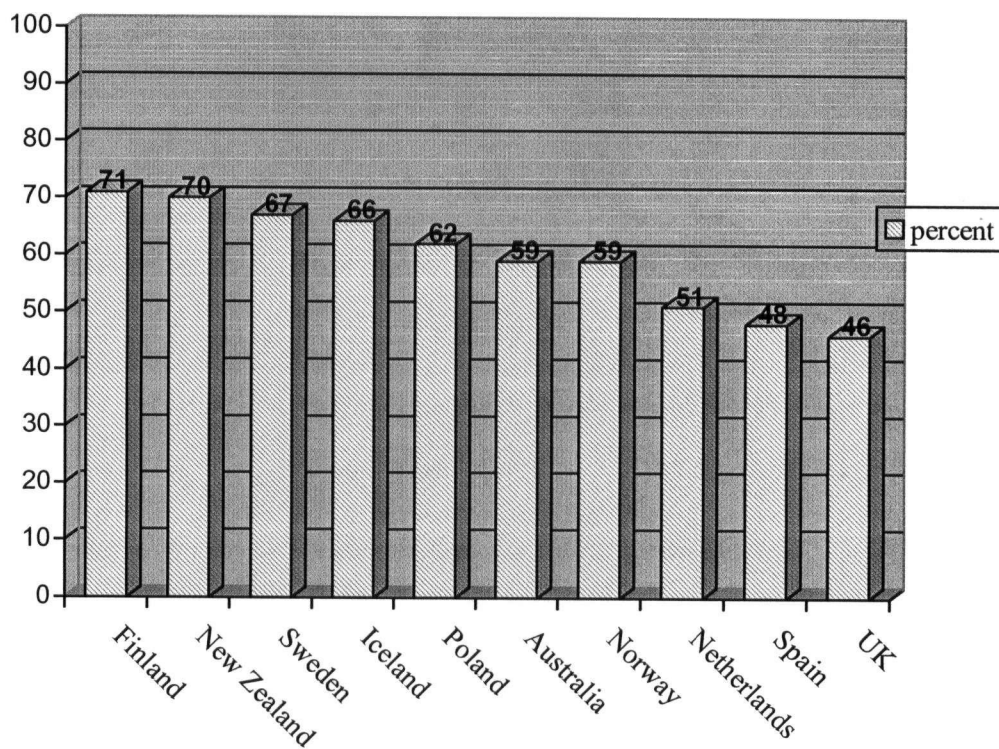
This raises important questions in respect to the relationship between education and social exclusion. Post-graduate education remains inaccessible to the vast majority of people leaving higher education, who have neither the funds to cover tuition fee costs nor the means of borrowing those funds. As Bourdieu has written, only certain social groups possess the social and economic resources necessary to prolong the education of their children to this extent, in ‘time free from economic necessity’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 246). In this thesis, I want to emphasis the links between localised credential inflation and international education. In Hong Kong, reform of the education system in the last 15 years has democratised access resulting, arguably, in credential inflation. I show that, similar to post-graduate education, the ‘overseas degree’ allows middle-class families in Hong Kong to seek a more rarefied form of qualification, with the result that it bestows

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<sup>5</sup> Figures for Canada were not available for this data. However, the university attendance rate for Canada is given as 19 percent (AUCC 2003).

greater value in the job market and exacerbates the impact of credential inflation for local graduates. I now turn to examine a critical ideology underlying the perpetuation of middle-class privilege in education: neoliberalism and the concept of 'choice' (Ball 2003).

**Figure 2.1: Entry rates for Tertiary Education (2000)**



Source of data: Department for Education and Skills (2004)

## **Education, geography and neoliberalism**

Research into the 'geography of education' has traditionally focused on local conditions impacting social exclusion, and particularly the relationship between deprivation, academic achievement and social mobility (Bondi and Matthews 1988, Garner 1988, Garner and Raudenbush 1991, Harris and Mercier 2000). Most recently, this research has been chiefly concerned with changes in the funding and delivery of public education at secondary level, primarily in a UK context (although these discussions are more widely applicable) (Herbert and Thomas 1998, Gibson and Asthana 1998a, 1998b, 2000, Herbert 2000). According to Gibson and Asthana:

'Over the course of the last decade, the provision of public services in the UK has been subjected to a remarkable experiment in governance. Under the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, consumer choice was introduced and vigorously pursued [...] In the education sector, this meant that school 'catchment areas' were replaced by more permeable 'designated areas'. From a situation where Local Education Authorities (LEAs) allocated pupils to schools according to place of residence, and in which there were few grounds for appeal, parents were encouraged to draw upon the evidence of 'School Performance Tables' and independent school inspections and choose between schools in what was conceived as an educational marketplace. This was intended to provide parents with choice, but it also sought to expose schools to competitive pressure and thereby impose incentives for improvement [...] In other words, the experiment with the marketization of education pursued under previous Conservative administrations continues unabated [...]' (Gibson and Asthana 2000, p. 303)

Through a diffusion of government authority characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism (Peck 2001, Peck and Tickell 2002), schools have been forced to take greater responsibility for their own academic 'performance', as they are compelled, also, to cooperate with a whole host of smaller government institutions. As this statement by



the British DfEE (Department for Education and Employment)<sup>6</sup> indicates, decentralisation has been rigorously pursued:

‘[Schools must] work in active partnership with LEAs, OFSTED and the DfEE. The LEAs role is to help schools set and meet targets. OFSTED’s role is to inspect performance by individual schools and LEAs, and to provide an external assessment of the state of the school system as a whole. The DfEE’s role is to set the policy framework, promote best practice, and to provide pressure and support in relation to LEAs as LEAs do for their schools.’ (DfEE 1997, p.12, quoted in Gibson and Asthana 2000, p. 305)<sup>7</sup>

The introduction of league tables in the 1990s<sup>8</sup> reinforced and extended changes in public education delivery, reflecting a ‘new culture’ with ‘a distinctly corporate feel’ (Wilce 1996, p. 8, quoted in Herbert and Thomas 1998, p.199). In Canada, the recent introduction of achievement tests in several provinces is a consequence of similar imperatives to standardise, measure and rank systems of education. As Harris and Mercier (2000) have observed:

‘These tests are part of sweeping attempts to restructure the public educational system and to increase its accountability [...] Politicians, and many parents, believe that such information enables them to make informed decisions about whether teachers, schools, and the educational system as a whole, are doing their job.’ (p. 211)

Benchmarking, ranking, policy frameworks, the implementation of ‘best practice’ and maximising output - these terms are not traditionally associated with public institutions such as schools, but rather with the strategies of large corporations (Sklair 2001). Yet these are the changes that have impacted education at all levels. These ‘local’

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<sup>6</sup> The department responsible for policy on education and training in England.

<sup>7</sup> LEA (Local Education Authority), OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education), DfEE (Department for Education and Employment).

<sup>8</sup> League tables were introduced for secondary schools in the UK in 1991 and for primary schools in England in 1997 (Herbert and Thomas 1998)

geographies of education are pertinent to understanding changes and developments in international education. Indeed, one striking feature of these processes is the way in which they seem to operate simultaneously at multiple spatial scales.

One of the most prominent parities between local and international education pertains to the concept of student ‘mobility’ and its relationship to the notion of ‘consumer choice’. At the local scale, choice and mobility are inextricably linked. The parents who can be said to exercise the greatest ‘choice’ are those able to drive their children to the preferred school, or those who will undertake ‘moving house to be in the catchment area of a successful school’ (Ward 2004, p. 7).<sup>9</sup> They are the most mobile of social groups and they are also, overwhelmingly, of middle-class background (Ball et al. 1995, Ball 2003, Butler 2003). The other side of this, of course, is the experience of those children left behind, forced to attend the schools rejected by the ‘choosers’ (what have become termed the ‘sink schools’). The parents of these children are relatively immobile and the inter-generational transmission of economic, cultural and social disadvantage is likely to continue in this way. This will be discussed in far greater detail in Section Two as I demonstrate similar, localised consequences for the social stratification of society when mobility and choice are exercised through international education.

A second striking similarity between changes in local education and those at an international scale entails the adoption of business terminology and entrepreneurial strategies by public-sector institutions. Schools are made accountable through an enforced preoccupation with testing, inspections, the publication of league tables and

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<sup>9</sup> Ward’s article, published in *The Guardian*, reports the findings of a survey of 1, 200 parents commissioned for ITV’s ‘Tonight’ programme (on UK television). It includes accounts of parents trying to bribe teachers and using fake addresses to get into the school of choice. It observes that it is the ‘middle-class parents’ who are most likely to apply these strategies.

‘benchmarking’, all of which are intended to increase parental ‘choice’ in what is now conceived as ‘an educational marketplace’ (Gibson and Asthana 2000, p. 303).

Thirdly, and aligned closely to the second point, Peck and Tickell (2002) have argued that: ‘one of the fundamental features of neoliberalism is its pervasiveness as a system of *diffused power*’ ... ‘neoliberal rule systems are perplexingly elusive; they operate between as well as within specific sites of incorporation and reproduction, such as national and local states’ (p. 400). I have already described the proliferation of various smaller governmental bodies overseeing the transformation of schooling; on the one hand they appear to increase accountability, on the other they seem to effectively dissolve it by decentralising control. In the rest of this section, I will show how these tendencies are *magnified* at an international scale: the ‘educational marketplace’ is aggressively competitive as countries, provinces, localities and institutions are forced to *compete against each other* for overseas students who bring valuable funds, whilst performance tables and benchmarking of various kinds imposed by external, supra-national bodies expose starkly the differences between both national systems and individual institutions, informing these ‘valuable’ and savvy students of the international geography of educational distinction.

### **Marketisation and the creation of distinction in education**

‘WBP [World Best Practice] becomes a globalizing practice when politicians and professionals inside and outside the major corporations begin to use it as a technique of social, political, and ideological control in the global capitalist system. It is no accident that the practice of benchmarking has spread out rapidly from the technical characteristics of manufacturing processes to administrative questions over a large range of industries and, eventually, to a host of non-industrial institutions such as educational establishments, medical and welfare services, and cultural bodies. In

short, the ubiquity of benchmarking [...] is a reflection of the commodification of everything' (Sklair 2001, p. 141).

In its various guises (some more apparent than others), the ideology of internationalism has impacted and transformed diverse aspects of educational provision, at all levels of delivery. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the various internationalising initiatives undertaken by public *school boards* in Canada, as they actively attempt to recruit young international students through the implementation of overseas marketing strategies.<sup>10</sup> Here, however, the focus is primarily at the level of governments and higher education institutions. In the remainder of this chapter, I develop the two central themes of 'differentiation' and 'standardisation'. I argue that through an examination of the ways in which education systems around the world have been pressured to standardise their practices, we can better understand how the development of a global geography of (differentiated) education has come about. This, in turn, is necessary for explicating emergent geographies of international student migration and the desire, therein, for specific forms of cultural capital.

First, I discuss some of the key ways in which governments and higher education institutions have both responded to and initiated the process of internationalisation, examining the nature of public-sector involvement in what has rapidly become a full-scale international education industry. The international mobility of students is at least partly related to the efforts of *some* countries to market their education overseas, to distinguish, in other words, their education systems from those *locally* available. This process of differentiation promotes the ideology of 'choice' on a global scale, by opening

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<sup>10</sup> In New Zealand, more than 20 percent of export earnings in the education sector come from revenue generated by *state schools* (Lewis 2004).

up hitherto relatively 'closed' national education systems to an international consumer. At the same time, and mirroring transformations at a local scale, the boundaries between 'state' (non-profit) and 'private' (for-profit) educational provision have become increasingly blurred, contributing to a redefinition of academic conceptualisations of the role and function of the nation-state.

Second, I show how 'global standards' in specifically international education have been imposed through a proliferation of testing systems, benchmarking, statistical measurements of national education systems and quasi-objective, external forms of 'quality control' of the kind described by Sklair (2001) above. Various supranational organisations have created the conditions for the global ranking of national education. These rankings (I will show in later chapters) are widely observed by prospective international students, perpetuating the notion that a 'better' education can be found at specific, overseas sites. The final stage in the argument addresses education-determined migration, which in the case of my Hong Kong study, is significantly a familial rather than individual project.

### **Internationalisation and the business of education**

National-level concern with 'overseas markets' has emerged alongside the implementation of neoliberal forms of governance in many advanced industrial nations, leading to cuts in state funding for public institutions, including higher education (Burbules and Torres 2000, Magnusson 2000, Farquhar 2001, Bayley et al. 2002). Over the same period, domestic enrolments in higher education have increased substantially and are predicted to increase further still. The convergence of these two factors has

resulted in what media sources have described as a funding ‘crisis’ for higher education institutions (Bygrave 2003).<sup>11</sup>

For some governments and institutions, the internationalisation of education is perceived as a panacea, offsetting to some degree the dual impacts of diminished state funding and increased domestic demand. Simply put, international students are a substantial source of income; in 2001/2002 they contributed 26.6 percent of the total budget of UK universities (*Education Guardian* 2004). In Australia, 1.1 percent of funding for higher education comes from the State government, 46.9 percent from the Commonwealth government, whilst students contribute 19 percent; this can be compared to 1987, when the figures were 1 percent, 82.9 percent and 2.3 percent respectively (Bayley et al. 2002). In the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, an increasing proportion of funding for higher education derives from international student tuition fees.

More generally, the export potential of international education is recognised, and debates have ensued over the role of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in the export of education (Schembri 1996, UNESCO 2001, McKinlay 2002, Robertson 2004). Concern has been voiced that the excessive trading of educational services will undermine ‘the public delivery of education’ (McKinlay 2002), with wider implications for the meaning of education in contemporary society.

The size of the global market in educational services has been recently estimated at US\$ 30 billion (3 percent of the international trade in services in OECD countries)

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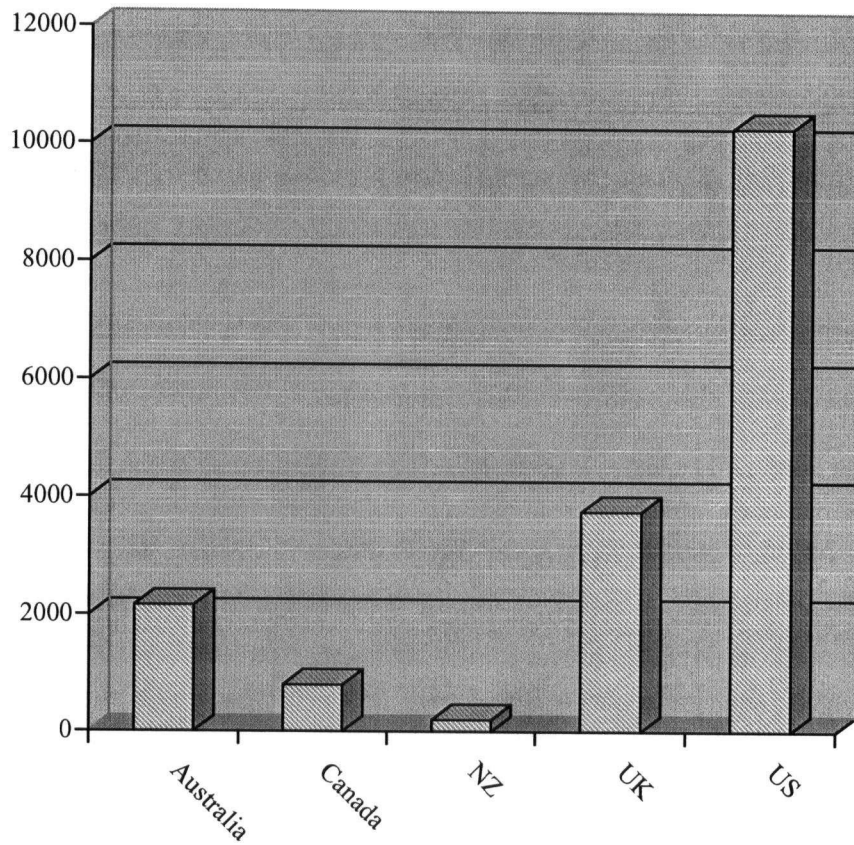
<sup>11</sup> For example, in Canada, funding per student in 2001 – 2002 was 17 percent lower than in 1992 – 93. In real terms, universities were receiving 4000 dollars less per student in 2002 than at the beginning of the 1980s, whilst full-time enrolment has increased by 45 000 students in the last 3 years (AUCC 2003). In the UK, funding per student has dropped 40 percent in the last 15 years, whilst enrolment in UK universities has doubled (*The Observer* 2003).

(OECD/CERI 2002). Yet, predictably, the global geography of trade in international education is highly uneven (figures 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4); only a few countries benefit from the export of educational services. Of the top four, the US is the largest net exporter of education, followed by the UK, Australia and Canada. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate the relative impact of educational exports by country.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that these data refer to foreign tertiary students, except for Australia and New Zealand, where foreign primary, secondary, post-secondary vocational training and language training are all included (OECD/CERI 2002).

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<sup>12</sup> For the UK, a figure of £7 billion per annum has been attached to the value of education exports (Department of Trade and Industry 2004). For Australia and New Zealand, educational exports are even more significant: in 2000 – 2001 education services were the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> largest service sector export earner respectively, and the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> largest overall export industry (OECD/CERI 2002).

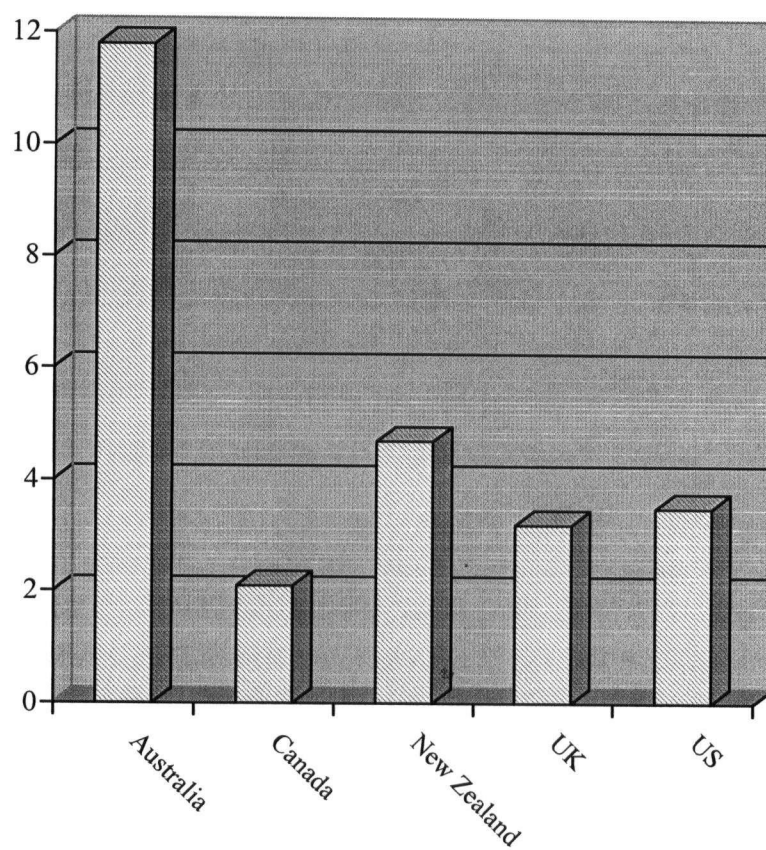
**Figure 2.2: Exports of Educational Services in  
\$US million 2000**



Source: OECD/CERI 2002

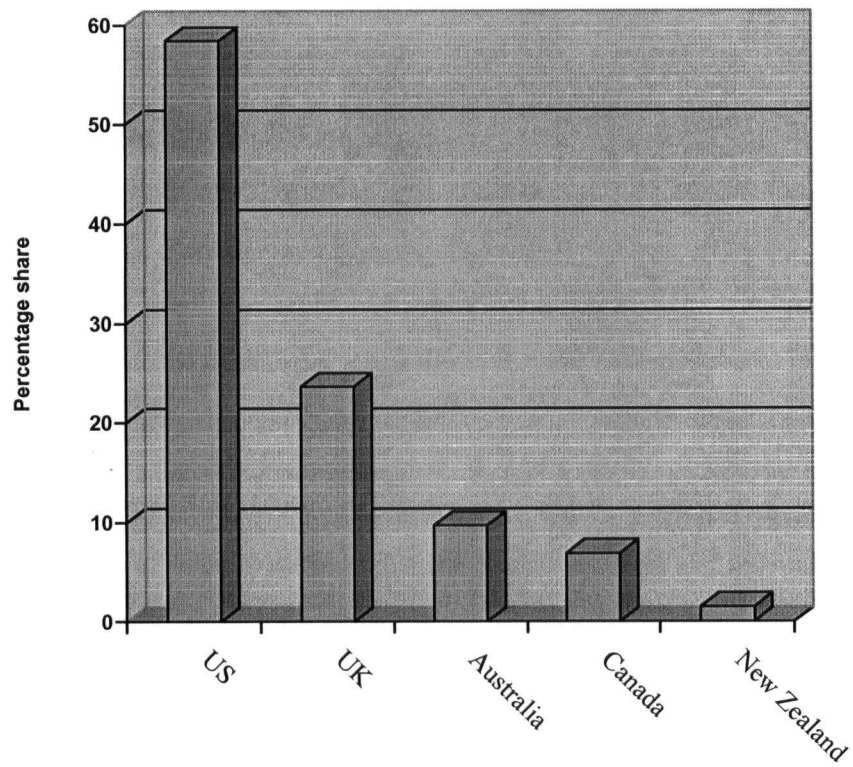


**Figure 2.3: Exports of Educational Services as a Percentage of Total Service Exports 2000**



Source: OECD/CERI 2002

**Figure 2.4: Market Share of International Students (2002)**



Source: British Council 2004

Countries have approached the internationalisation of their education systems in different ways. Like Canada (detailed in chapter 3), the United States lacks a central, government-wide policy for international education (NAFSA 2003), despite the fact that educational exports were worth \$12 billion to the US economy in 2001 (*The Economist* 2003). The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 have had a considerable impact on the development of a national strategy for promoting international education.<sup>13</sup> The US has recently implemented a national computer database, managed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and designed to track foreign students for the duration of their study (*The Economist* 2003). The student visa rejection rate has also increased significantly over the same period (*ibid.*).<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, the internationalisation of Australia's higher education sector is a highly centralised and coordinated affair, undertaken by one main organisation, the 'IDP' (or International Development Programme), with support from 'Australian Education International' (AEI).<sup>15</sup> The IDP is currently owned by 38 of Australia's 39 universities. It is a non-profit organisation, and yet has an annual turnover of \$108.1 million, a growth in turnover since 1991 of 20 percent and in 2002 it ranked 353 in BRW's top 500 private companies (IDP 2002).<sup>16</sup> The blurring of lines between 'public' and 'private' institutions is particularly stark in this instance.

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<sup>13</sup> A speech by former US president Bill Clinton in 2000 committed the US to an increase in international students and pledged government support for internationalising strategies (*Canadian Internationalist* 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Libya saw the number of student visa issues fall by 60 percent in the year following September 2001 (*The Economist* 2003).

<sup>15</sup> AEI is the official government website for international education dealing primarily with general student enquiries.

<sup>16</sup> BRW is Australia's largest business magazine.

The UK has followed Australia with a successful attempt to centralise the organisation of international education, through the British Council. The British Council is a non-profit organization, which operates as an executive non-departmental public body and is sponsored by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In a statement of its 'rationale and values', beliefs in the 'benefits of internationalism' were earnestly espoused (British Council 2004). For 2003/2004, the financial turnover of the Council was estimated at £479 million - £164 million from a core grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and £154 million from the selling of services such as English language courses and examinations (British Council 2004). In 2002 - 2003 the Council worked in 110 countries, and taught English to 500, 000 students (ibid.). Interestingly, it has also engaged in close collaboration with IDP Australia. Together they have developed the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and in April this year they hosted a one-day conference in London (UK), *Vision 2020: Forecasting International Student Mobility*, to discuss the findings of a recent research project modelling the future impacts of student mobility. On this collaboration, the British Council has written:

'Much thought was given to the logic behind the UK collaborating with Australia – a major international competitor in this activity for the UK. Indeed, Australia has been very successful over the last few years in winning market share from the UK, particularly in Asia. However, it was the view of all concerned that the need to understand better the main drivers and trends in the global demand for international student places overrode such concerns' (British Council 2004, p. 14).

As I will show, such international partnerships are even more prolific at the regional, local and institutional levels.

International education in New Zealand is coordinated by a single non-profit organisation, which describes itself as 'independent of government, recognised by

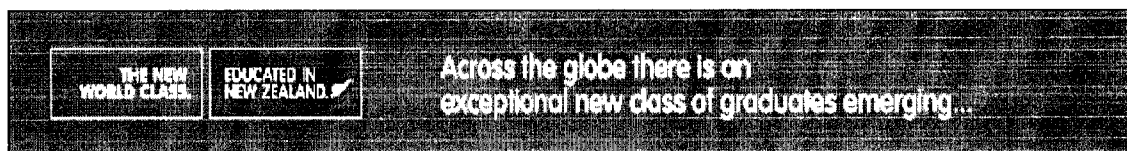
government, and industry owned' (Education New Zealand 2004). 'Education New Zealand' acts on behalf of both state and private education providers at secondary and tertiary levels. Its functions are said to include: 'advocacy on behalf of New Zealand's education export industry' 'assisting the New Zealand government and its agencies with policy development in relation to the education export industry', 'promotion of New Zealand as a study destination' and 'promotion of the 'Educated in New Zealand' brand' (Education New Zealand 2004). It exemplifies the cross-government associations characteristic of international education, involving the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand Immigration Service and the Asia 2000 Foundation.

### **'Branding' education systems**

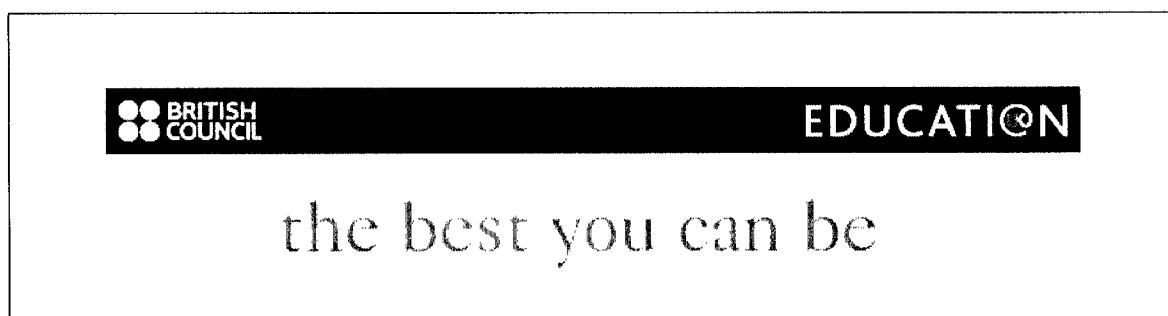
One of the starkest demonstrations of marketisation in education involves the explicit branding of national education systems geared towards an overseas consumer. New Zealand is the latest country to launch a coordinated marketing campaign; the 'Educated in New Zealand' brand appeared in 2001 (Lewis 2004) (figure 2.5). The New Zealand government hired a private company to devise an international marketing plan, and allocated \$3.5 million over 5 years to develop the proposed brand, including support for a so-called 'one-stop-shop' website (NZIEMN 2003). In June 2004, control of the international marketing of New Zealand's education will be transferred to the 'Promotions and PR Reference Group', and core funding for the internationalisation of the education system will thereby shift *from government to industry* (NZIEMN 2003).

The UK exemplifies coordinated government efforts to develop a national education brand (figure 2.6). As in New Zealand, this process, administered through the British Council, has involved collaboration across several government departments. The Council receives funding for the marketing of UK education from the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (The Brand Report 1999). It also employs several large *private* companies for research (MORI and LD&A), public relations (Shanwick), and brand development/advertising (McCann Erickson Manchester) (ibid.).

**Figure 2.5: ‘Educated in New Zealand’ Brand<sup>17</sup>**



**Figure 2.6: ‘Education UK’ Brand**



<sup>17</sup> The brand’s emphasis on a ‘new world class’ is particularly intriguing. I will discuss, in chapter 6, some of the ways in which international education can be seen to be actively creating ‘strategic cosmopolitans’ (Mitchell 2003) and a new transnational capitalist class of people (Sklair 2001).

As part of the process of 'brand development', research conducted on behalf of the British Council sought to establish the distinctive characteristics of different national education systems, particularly the exceptional attraction of the United States and Australia for overseas students (The Brand Report 1999). A 'unique image' was then created for British education and the 'Education UK' brand was officially launched in 2000, involving several high-profile overseas events, beginning, significantly, in Hong Kong (British Council 2000). The British Council has written: '[t]he Hong Kong event marked the start of the global Brand roll-out across more than 20 countries. 2000 saw launches and roll-out campaigns in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Japan, Russia and Brazil, to name but a few.' Presently, the Education UK brand offers six 'products' to potential students, including English-language, degree, MBA and post-graduate courses (British Council 2000). I experienced first hand the role of the British Council in the overseas marketing of the 'Education UK' brand at an international education exhibition in Hong Kong, February 15 – 16<sup>th</sup> 2003. The exhibition was a slick affair, held in the spacious arena at the Hong Kong Exhibition Centre, and was preceded by an extensive advertising campaign throughout the territory. Representatives from 21 private schools, 14 further education colleges, and 78 British higher education institutions attended the event, at a cost of £3000 each, paid to the British Council. For the British Council, at least, this was clearly a successful event.

### **Institutional initiatives: new strategic geographies of education**

Public institutions are increasingly faced with the prospect of balancing local and national interests with international and 'global' agendas. Presently, the need to prioritise the education of 'domestic' students is challenged by the economic imperative to network

and strategise within a global system of education providers. The expansion of international education and the demand from overseas students has coincided with cuts in government funding for higher education institutions. In what follows I consider some of the major institutional initiatives with regards to international education and the new geographies to have emerged as a result.

In Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, a number of public education institutions have very recently engaged in overtly entrepreneurial activities related to the development, marketing and provision of international products and services. Many have established 'satellite' university campuses, distance- or e-learning programmes, international MBA courses, and student and staff exchanges. Some have offered joint degrees with overseas institutions and all have been involved in the active recruitment of students through overseas education events and the employment of local education consultants to work locally on their behalf. Partnerships with local institutions in delivering courses are increasingly common and, in the case of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, a regional partnership amongst institutions has been pursued (this will be examined in relation to Canada in chapter 3).<sup>18</sup> Frequently international institutional collaborations have occurred without the involvement of national governments.

Universitas 21 (U21) is an excellent example of an institutional partnership to have emerged as a direct result of the internationalisation of education.

'Universitas 21 is an international network of leading research-intensive universities. Its purpose is to facilitate collaboration and co-operation between the member universities and to create entrepreneurial opportunities for them on a scale that none

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<sup>18</sup> Much of this information has been acquired through attendance and informal discussions at international education exhibitions during fieldwork in Hong Kong.



of them would be able to achieve operating independently or through traditional bilateral alliances.’ (Universitas 21 2004)

The organisation was founded in 1997 and has 17 members from 10 countries.<sup>19</sup> In 2001 ‘Universitas 21’ initiated ‘Universitas 21 Global’ - a result of collaboration between 16 of the member institutions and the Thompson Learning Corporation. U21 Global is concerned with establishing on-line degree courses, and in 2003 it launched its first - a completely on-line MBA programme. The Masters course is sold to major markets in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia (Yeung and Yow 2001).

U21 Global exemplifies the increasingly common and close relationship between the public and private sectors in education characteristic of neoliberal transformations. ‘Thompson Learning’ is a large, private publishing company that has provided the technology and expertise behind U21 Global in addition to US\$ 25 million in funds (Yeung and Yow 2001). Universitas 21 is also implicated in the drive to manage modes of assessment and enforce quality control in international education, marketing the U21 brand on the basis of this image; it has been directly involved in the development of international quality assessment tools through *U21pedagogica*. Using the internal quality assessment measures of member institutions, *U21pedagogica* seeks to expand to ‘other areas of higher education.’

‘Future clients may include universities, higher education consortia, and government agencies interested in benefiting from *U21pedagogica*’s knowledge and experience in evaluating on-line education...’ (Universitas21 2004)

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<sup>19</sup> The members of Universitas 21 are: University of Melbourne, University of Queensland, University of New South Wales, University of Auckland, University of Hong Kong, National University of Singapore, Peking University, Fudan University, University of British Columbia, McGill University, University of Virginia, University of Birmingham, University of Nottingham, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Lund University, and Albert-Ludwigs-Universitat Freiburg.

On one level, Universitas 21, along with other emergent forms of 'e-learning', is redefining the geography of international education. The annual review highlights its main initiatives during 2003/2004, including the promotion of student mobility between member institutions and the development of joint courses. New technology is undermining the necessity of spatial mobility - 'WebCT' is used to run tutorial groups simultaneously on three continents. U21 is also piloting the use of electronic books. Simply put, the developments represented by U21 Global are allowing students access to an overseas education *at home*. Potentially, this could directly challenge the claim that mobility *per se* is crucial to the generation of cultural capital amongst transnational students. On the other hand, we must ask to what extent the 'academic credential' is the only defining element in the cultural capital of the international student, vis-à-vis a whole number of other social encounters and cultural transformations inextricably linked to the experience of long-distance mobility.

Some of the local implications of these developments are suggested at the end of the following statement from Universitas 21:

'Universitas 21 is uniquely positioned to invest international credibility, brand recognition and quality assurance into new global educational partnerships. All Universitas 21 universities have already made considerable progress in enriching their campus-based learning environments by drawing on new information technologies and cognate pedagogical developments. Engagement through Universitas 21 Global in online distance education is an important catalyst for continuing and guiding such developments. It also provides a vehicle through which Universitas 21 can contribute to the solving of one of globalisation's most acute problems: how to bring higher education to the estimated 85 per cent of the world where traditional solutions are demonstrably inadequate.' (Universitas 21 2003)

To what extent will Universitas bring education to those unable to travel overseas? Does Universitas merely attract prospective international students or does it have much wider

community impacts across social groups? The financial costs of the MBA programme are instructive: in Singapore, the cost of the MBA is US\$ 11, 850 for the degree programme and US\$724 for a single subject (Universitas 21 2003). Do these new educational technologies, alliances and networks merely perpetuate and possibly exacerbate global inequalities in educational access and cultural capital? Towards answering these questions, I want to consider some of the more significant ways in which principles of standardisation in global education are being imposed and entrenched.

### **Entrenching standardisation in education: global testing systems**

The proliferation of testing, ranking and benchmarking in local secondary education, and the progressive involvement of private companies in public systems might be conceived as reflecting a broader philosophy concerning the importance of 'consumer choice' in educational provision. The practices and strategies adopted by government at this local level are, I propose, amplified at the level of international education, where large private companies intersect with public higher education institutions through the formulation and administration of 'standardised' testing systems and the creation, globally, of markers of educational distinction.

One of the foremost examples of global educational testing is provided in the 'Educational Testing Service' (ETS), a private company that in 1947 procured the testing programmes of the American Council on Education, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the College Entrance Examination Board. The ETS now possesses ten trademarks associated with international educational testing, including the Graduate Record Examinations®, GRE®, The Praxis Series: Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers®, TOEFL® (Test of English as a Foreign Language), TSE®

(Test of Spoken English), and TWE® (Test of Written English) (ETS 2003). It describes itself as 'the world's largest private educational measurement organisation' and claims that since 1964, nearly 20 million students have taken the TOEFL in more than 105 countries. More than 4,500 institutions worldwide use the scores from these tests for international recruitment (TOEFL 2003). In addition, ETS runs the 'Centre for Global Assessment' and the 'Global Institute', with the mandate to develop curricula and courses 'that meet the training and development needs for education officials in government offices, colleges and universities, and testing agencies' (ETS 2003). The ETS not only administers and designs tests, therefore, it also propagates this system through the training of 'officials' within the education sector.

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) provides another example of the strategic internationalisation (and aggressive marketing) of testing systems, and their consequent worldwide adoption. It demonstrates, also, the international alliances forged through these processes, being jointly managed by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, the British Council, and IDP Education Australia. Figures for IELTS Australia claim an annual turnover of \$19.8 million (IDP 2002), and a growth in turnover from 2001 of 61 percent. In 2002, IELTS Australia operated in 26 different countries, it administered 92, 986 tests and it has 92 test centres worldwide (IDP 2002). Perhaps most significantly, IELTS has captured the Chinese market through a 'network partnership' (the China IELTS Network). In 2002, 89, 134 tests were administered through this network (a growth of 95 percent on the previous year). The IELTS is the *only* test accepted by the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

for student visa purposes (Studyinaustralia 2004<sup>20</sup>), suggesting a gradual cornering of the the global market in testing and standardisation.

### **Supranational organisations and universal measurements**

I want now to return to the relationship between large supranational organisations and the internationalisation of education, focussing specifically on the role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in collaboration with the OECD and the World Bank. Founded in 1946, UNESCO presently has 189 member states and is involved in scientific, cultural and educational projects throughout the world. Its overarching objective is to promote cooperation and understanding among nation-states, which consequently facilitates the development of comparable, normalised education systems globally.

I have already suggested the role of UNESCO in instilling a universal appreciation of formal education. Here I want to focus on a specific feature of the organisation's mandate, that is, its role in developing and implementing the practice of 'standard-setting' in international education through 'preparing and enabling the adoption of international instruments and statutory recommendations' (UNESCO 2003a). These forms of standardisation involve, principally, the measurement and monitoring of national education systems and, crucially, their insertion into and consolidation within a *formal ranking* of global education.

Several key features of this particular role can be identified. UNESCO is responsible for producing the 'World Education Report' (1993, 2000), containing statistics on various aspects of educational provision for 190 countries and territories. Since the 1993 report,

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<sup>20</sup> This is the official government website for international students.

UNESCO has sought to expand and deepen available data, through the worldwide dissemination of the revised 'International Standard Classification of Education' (ISCED) - a formula devised by the organisation. Moreover, in 1997, and in conjunction with the OECD, UNESCO launched the 'World Education Indicators' (WEI) project. As described here:

'The primary aim of the project is to develop, working closely with national teams, a small but critical mass of policy-relevant education indicators that measure the current state of education in an internationally comparable...manner.' (UNESCO 2002)

The project has produced a comparative data set of education indicators for 1998 – 2001, including 'detailed mappings of national education systems' and three substantive reports.<sup>21</sup> The organisation has also developed the Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications. Its 'mission [...] is to link existing frameworks dealing with international issues of quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications and provide a platform for dialogue between them. The main objective of this Global Forum is to address new challenges to access, quality and equity brought on by the increase in private and commercial provision for higher education world wide.' The forum was launched in 2002.

### **Further geographical implications**

To date, academics have generally failed to advance a substantial critique of international education and discussions of the potentially negative impacts of internationalism on education systems are therefore limited (non-academic accounts are

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<sup>21</sup> 'Investing in Education' (1999), 'Teachers for Tomorrow's Schools' (2001), and 'Financing Education – Investments and Returns' (2003).

dominated by 'positive' portrayals).<sup>22</sup> There exists only a scattering of literature expressing some apprehension over aspects of the internationalisation of education; I will briefly attend to the most salient points here, including the potential impact of internationalisation on *local* educational provision and access; the relationship between economic imperatives and the public delivery of education; and the issue of teaching quality.

In one of the few published academic accounts, Bayley et al. (2002) have examined the impacts of internationalisation on university admissions in Australia. They trace the process to 1989, when government restrictions on the ability of universities to generate private income were lifted. Universities were thereafter able to set fees for international students at cost or above and were also unconstrained in the numbers they could admit. Their research focussed specifically upon the impact of foreign student programmes at the universities of Monash, Melbourne, and RMIT on access for local (Victorian) students. They write:

'over the past 15 years, changes to Commonwealth education policy and funding arrangements have altered the financial incentives faced by universities, such that the relative proportion of marginally-funded domestic HECS<sup>23</sup> students has reduced and the proportion of full fee-paying domestic and international students has increased.' (p. 46)

Between 1996 and 2000, they found, the number of Commonwealth-funded *domestic HECS student places* in Victoria had *fallen* by 5.6 percent (see McKinlay 2002 for New

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<sup>22</sup> One objective of this thesis is to address this omission, by demonstrating how wider debates in and around 'education' and migration are directly relevant to the development of such a critique.

<sup>23</sup> HECS stands for 'The Higher Education Contribution Scheme'. It was introduced in 1989 to supplement funding of the Australian higher education system. Most students must make a contribution towards the cost of their tertiary education. They have a choice of paying their contribution up front or deferring payment by taking out a loan from the Commonwealth.' <http://www.ato.gov.au> (accessed 08/06/04).

Zealand), whereas the number of international students had risen substantially. Furthermore, international students were found to be heavily concentrated in specific academic departments.<sup>24</sup> Local students, it is implied, may be effectively shut out of some academic courses, largely as a consequence of the imperative, faced by universities, to seek the alternative sources of funding proffered by international student tuition fees. As a more general point, this can be seen as yet another example of the 'social exclusionary' tendencies embedded within the process of internationalisation.

Bayley et al. (2002) also raise the issue of standards in international university education, specifically in relation to admission and examination procedures. They write:

'At the very broad level, criteria for university entry are the same for both domestic and international undergraduate students, that is, past academic performance and the capacity to succeed. The selection processes for international and domestic students against these criteria, however, are different. Domestic students are selected on a comparative basis judged on their individual ENTER scores, and university first round offers are administered by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC). International students, on the other hand, are assessed directly by university Admission Offices with assistance from faculties and selected on the basis of published minimum entry requirements.' (Bayley et al. 2002, p. 48)

In Hong Kong and in the UK, newspapers have directly criticised Australian universities over academic standards in relation to international students. The issue was first raised in the *South China Morning Post* (2001), where it was claimed that Asian students gained entry to Australian universities even if they had 'failed' to meet the requirements.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Hong Kong employers 'have voiced fears over the standard of graduates

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<sup>24</sup> 56 percent of RMIT's foreign students were enrolled in the faculties of Business, Administration and Economics, 57 percent of the University of Melbourne's foreign students were enrolled in the faculties of Economics and Commerce, Engineering and Science and 72 percent of Monash University's foreign students are enrolled in 2 of the 10 faculties – Information Technology, and Business and Economics.

<sup>25</sup> I was told similar stories at the British Council education exhibition in Hong Kong.



returning from Australia' (Wan 2001).<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, an article in the British *Financial Times* (2003) accused five Australian universities of overlooking widespread plagiarism amongst international students, observing that the students 'are worth about A\$2 billion a year to many Australian universities. Some academics believe such profitability persuades many schools to look the other way when it comes to cheating.' Concerns over standards in international education have spawned even more forms of government surveillance, the Australian Universities Quality Agency being a case in point, despite the fact that quality assurance mechanisms in education are more prolific then ever.

Recent media reports have also flagged the problem of 'bogus colleges'. In Canada, the 'flourishing' of career colleges selling 'fraudulent documents to foreign students' (Friscolanti 2003) is attributed to the absence of formal mechanisms for monitoring private educational institutions. Related to this, concern has also been raised about the quality of teaching received by significant numbers of ESL students in private language institutes (Westad 2004).<sup>27</sup> Recognising the substantive economic incentives underlying these circumstances, a retired senior immigration official was reported as saying:

'It has become big business. The idea that Canadian learning institutions can make money by having foreign students attend those institutions is something that has really caught on and has attracted a lot of unsavoury people to make a quick buck' (quoted in Friscolanti 2003).

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<sup>26</sup> This article sparked several letters in response (Jan 15 2001, Jan 18 2001), including one from David Kemp, Australian Federal Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and Professor Ian Chubb, President of the Council of Australian Presidents, claiming that the content of the report was 'unsubstantiated and have the potential to seriously undermine the well-earned international reputation of Australian universities... The importance Australia places on the quality of education services to international students is reflected in the fact that Australia is one of the few countries in the world with national legislation and a Code of Ethical Practice specifically designed to protect the interests of international students. The Australian Universities Quality Agency, recently established by the Government, has a strong remit to assure the quality of Australian university education, both in Australia and overseas...' *South China Morning Post* Thursday Jan 18 2001.

<sup>27</sup> There are currently 206 ESL schools in British Columbia subject to 'inadequate' regulation. ESL schools do not have to be accredited and, in April 2004 provincial legislation changed to remove ESL schools from the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission, thereby removing also any form of official regulation.

Similarly in the UK, *The Guardian* (2004) has acknowledged some of the broader issues surrounding ‘the plethora of “mushroom colleges” that spring up overnight and disappear just as quickly’, offering short-term courses to overseas students, thereby facilitating entry into the increasingly restricted UK.’ As the newspaper reported: ‘The issue is politically contentious because it has to be tackled without killing the £2bn a year golden goose that overseas students represent’. Clearly, the economics of internationalisation have to be carefully balanced against other weighty political and social concerns.

### **In summary**

I have begun, in this chapter, to suggest what a theory of geographically differentiated cultural capital may look like in accounting for emergent patterns of global student mobility. The uneven process of internationalisation, underpinned by neoliberal ideology, has led, I have argued here, to dual tendencies towards the standardisation and differentiation of education, at the level of the national system, which are also highly geographically differentiated. In later chapters, I will show how these large scale processes mirror local-level changes in education related to an emergent discourse incorporating principles of parental ‘choice’ and the ‘educational market place’. In the next chapter, I demonstrate these processes through the example of Canada, examining how internationalisation has impacted education from the national-level to the individual institution.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **INTERNATIONALISM AND EDUCATION IN CANADA**

‘Even the term – education industry – would have been unthinkable just a few short years ago. But now we do see education as an industry [...] And because education is an industry, we need to bring the same discipline and approaches to it that we have to more traditional industries. We need to identify our “markets”, develop and promote our “products”, differentiate them from our “competition” and create “business plans” to bring all of those elements together. From my perspective, as Minister for International Trade, I see an obligation to promote our educational industry abroad just as we promote our other goods and services. I see an obligation to open up new markets and to ensure that the rules are clear and the playing field fair [...] Education has also become a valuable economic resource. It is not only good business, it is big business’ (Sergio Marchi, Canada Minister for International Trade, Toronto 1998)

This statement, made by the Minister for International Trade at the Second Annual Canadian Education Industry Summit, provides an insight into the extent to which internationalism has permeated education, at the level of the nation-state, in Canada. It contains all the hallmarks of the various features of internationalisation described in chapter 2: the commodification of education as a ‘product’, its development and marketing, an overt concern with the application of universal rules and standards and the aspiration for distinction in a global arena. As this chapter will indicate, these interests are identifiable not only nationally, but also at provincial and municipal levels, as well as within individual institutions. Various stakeholders are cognisant of the emerging map of international education and are striving to secure an eminent position within it.

In explicating the new geographies of cultural capital in relation to international education, this chapter seeks to show how the discourse, ideology, and practices of internationalisation have impacted education in Canada at various scales, from national to

provincial to local. I argue that the ideological ascendance of ‘internationalism’ is inextricably linked to the reconfiguring of nation-state power and the diffusion of governance characteristic of the latest phase of neoliberal entrenchment.<sup>1</sup> Neoliberalism has facilitated the development and proliferation of a variety of ‘tools’ promoting the standardisation and regulation of national education in an international context. It has created the political and social climate wherein partnerships between the public and private sectors around the delivery and marketing of education, as well as the aggressive pursuit of internationalisation by public institutions, are increasingly normalised. It has also transformed social discourse around education, such that terminology invoking business-style practices (for example, the ‘parent-consumer’, ‘educational products’, ‘benchmarking’ and ‘best practice’) are commonplace. These strategies, which will provide the focus of this chapter, are significant in actively creating the *differentiation* of education at multiple spatial scales. I use the general concept of differentiation to refer to the ways in which education systems at the national, regional, and institutional levels are distinguished through the variable *attribution of symbolic value*, creating new maps of ‘institutionalised cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1984, 1986).<sup>2</sup> I should also add, however, that the process of ‘internationalisation’ within Canada is neither universally implemented nor embraced. As I will show with particular reference to the educational institution, the ‘model’ of internationalisation is often frustratingly difficult to impose everywhere, providing a caution against the universal application of the concept of neoliberalism within intellectual debate.

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<sup>1</sup> This is particularly so in the West but equally applicable to nation-states where the World Bank and IMF wield significant power over public spending on education (see Gould 2000).

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss in later chapters the various forms that cultural capital can take (Bourdieu 1986). The credential is only one form of cultural capital, although, it would seem, a very important one.

Here, I have three related aims. The first is a general discussion of neoliberalism and public education in Canada, providing the ideological and discursive context for the various strategies associated with internationalisation; second, through empirical examples, I will show how a variety of entrepreneurial strategies at different levels of government have attempted to distinguish Canadian education from its perceived 'competitors'; and third, the analysis in this chapter focuses progressively on British Columbia and Vancouver, where a significant portion of the empirical work was undertaken, providing a framework for later discussions. A more geographically sensitive appreciation of cultural capital necessitates an understanding of the specific locales within which the value of students' credentials is created and sustained.

### **Neoliberalism and education in Canada**

'Various rationales in support of the development of international education in Canada, including cultural exchange, foreign policy implications etc., have been proposed. However, the 'economic rationale' seems to speak most loudly and clearly to Canadians' (Farquhar 2001, p. 4).

The statement by Sergio Marchi is suggestive of a more general process characteristic of the transformation of education in advanced industrial societies. I refer to the conceptual shift away from a post-war perception of education as the foundation of 'economic nationalism' (Brown et al. 1997), towards the influence of a pervasive neoliberalism in a new *transnational* context (Burbules and Torres 2000, Morrow and Torres 2000, Apple 2000, Mitchell 2003), as described in chapter 2. Like many other countries, the development of Canada's system of public education between 1840 and 1870 was 'part of a deliberate strategy by political liberals to forge a new political

nationality' (Mitchell 2003). Mitchell writes: 'Although the system was decentralized and there were some large variations among the provinces, the galvanizing force behind most educational policies and practices was the broad understanding that public schools were crucial institutions in shaping the incipient national character' (Mitchell 2003, p. 393).

By the 1970s the philosophy of 'multiculturalism' guided the delivery and practice of education, espousing the belief that Canada could find national unity 'with and through difference' (Mitchell 2003, p. 394). According to Mitchell (2003), the sea change in Canadian national education occurred in the late 1980s, as a result of the publication of two major reports, both criticising the current system (Radwanski 1987 and Sullivan 1988, both cited in Mitchell 2003). These called for a more practical, business-oriented approach to learning, geared to success in the global economy and backed by the Progressive Conservative government in the 1990s. Magnusson (2000) argues that the move from a 'Keynesian welfare state paradigm' to 'an alternative, neoliberal economic model' in Canada can be traced to the 1993 general election and, in particular, the Social Security Reform introduced in 1994, which instigated a \$2 billion reduction in federal-government spending on higher education and paved the way for additional provincial-level retrenchment (Magnusson 2000, p. 80, Farquhar 2001). As he indicates, these specific events are indicative of the wider impacts of neoliberal ideology upon higher education institutions:

'the shaping of intellectual work in Canadian universities through the discourse and discursive practices of neoliberal restructuring can no longer be denied. Within this discourse, conceptions of quality and excellence are linked to economic development through innovation and training of knowledge workers. Restructuring practices such as performance-based funding, institutional funding contingent on business partnerships, and curricula jointly developed and delivered by the public and private sector are transforming the university in terms of its institutional form. Deregulated tuition fees for designer degrees (such as executive MBAs and infotechs) set the

stage for commodity fetishism with regard to higher education as a consumer commodity.' (2000, p. 82/83)

This description of the discourse and practices of neoliberal restructuring, alluding to 'performance-based funding', public-private partnerships, and 'designer degrees', identifies some of the key features of the internationalisation of education in Canada. This chapter demonstrates the discursive and material strategies by which public education institutions, at various scales, are actively contributing to a global map of cultural capital through attempts to create a 'myth' of their own worth.<sup>3</sup> This task will be achieved through a number of steps, beginning with a discussion of the role of government (federal, provincial and municipal) in initiating and responding to the internationalisation of education, before looking in more detail at individual institutions and their attempts to forge strategic transnational connections.

### **Government and international education**

'There remain some major concerns among the international education community. Principal among them is the lament that an overall strategic thrust is missing, there is fragmentation of effort, that no powerful and vocal 'champion' of the cause has come forward to signal its importance and lead the charge, that no national 'brand' for Canadian education has been developed and promoted nor any 'signature' program created...' (Farquhar 2001, p. 14)

In chapter 2, I discussed the various ways in which certain countries – namely the US, Australia, New Zealand and the UK – have approached the issue of international education, focussing in particular upon government strategies in response to external pressures arising from globalisation and the influence of neoliberal ideology. I suggested then that Canada, like the US, has so far lacked a centralised, government-wide policy in

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu (1996) has described how certain educational institutions in France have actively created a myth of prestige and value around themselves.

respect of international education. Canada, I would argue, is an interesting case precisely because of the absence of a national strategy; the diversity through which internationalisation is pursued epitomises the rescaling of geographies of institutionalised cultural capital, and the transnational, 'trans-local' connections forged therein.

Perhaps one of the more significant reasons for the absence of a government-wide strategy on international education, of the kind exemplified by the British Council (UK) and the IDP (Australia), lies with Canada's political structure. In Canada, federal government and provincial government have jurisdiction over different aspects of what could potentially fall under the rubric of 'international education'. Educational policy and practice, through the Ministry of Education, is the responsibility of *provincial* government, and the provinces can, and do, differ considerably in approaches to internationalisation (Farquhar 2001). At the same time, other important facets of international education come under the jurisdiction of *federal* government. Thus, foreign policy, human resource development, international trade and immigration policy are all the responsibility of federal departments. International Trade Canada (ITCan) administers the export of educational services, and Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) is responsible for international diplomacy, treaties and the promotion of Canadian culture. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) advocates the 'formation of international partnerships which foster collaboration and joint approaches to learning, including the development of common curriculum [and] courses,' (including student exchanges), and 'positive recognition among Canadian universities and colleges of the growing significance of the internationalisation of education' (HRSDC 2004).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> HRSDC was until recently part of HRDC, while FAC and ITCan were hitherto grouped under one department: DFAIT.



Immigration policy is the responsibility of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), and this includes the issuing of international study permits (formerly student visas).

It is this complex division of responsibilities, between federal and provincial government, that makes the conception and implementation of a distinct plan for international education especially problematic. The formal mechanisms initiated to resolve this, namely the 'Federal-Provincial Consultative Committee on Education-Related International Activities' (FPCCERIA) and the 'Education Marketing Advisory Board', have so far been unsuccessful in achieving their objectives (Farquhar 2001).<sup>5</sup>

In what follows, I aim to provide a sense of the strategic importance of internationalisation within Canada. I am particularly concerned with uncovering the means by which Canada has attempted to insert itself within a global map of international education and, from this, to infer some implications for the symbolic significance of education in an international context.

### **Federal initiatives on international education**

The implementation of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* in June 2002 intimated the importance of international education for Canadian federal government by including provisions for facilitating the entry of students into Canada. Under the new regulations, students on courses of six months or less no longer require a study permit (The Monitor 2003a).<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the act also allows international students who have studied in Canada for two years to obtain an additional five points under new

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<sup>5</sup> The absence of a unitary authority overseeing international education has been blamed, also, for the emergence of the so-called 'visa schools' described in chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, fewer students were *recorded* in 2002, although it is likely that many more were admitted.

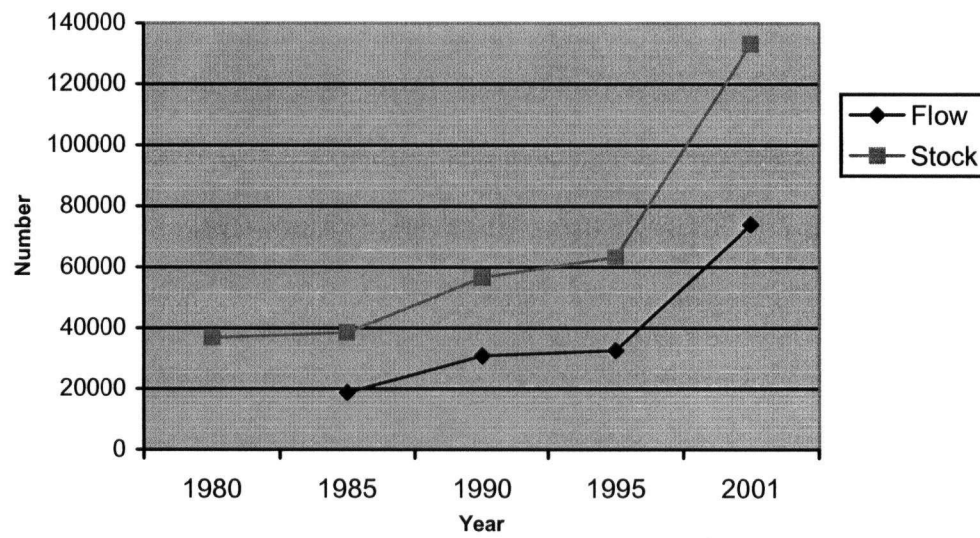
immigration selection criteria (CIC 2003). In 2003, Citizenship and Immigration Canada produced the first comprehensive report on foreign students in Canada, indicating, once again, federal-level interest in these processes.<sup>7</sup> This report facilitates the undertaking of unprecedented analysis of recent changes in student mobility over time and informs the following discussion.

Canada has experienced an exceptional growth in its stock of international students over the last twenty years: from 37, 000 in 1980 to over 130, 000 in 2001. East Asia has been the principal source of students during this period; in 2001, South Korea, China, Japan and Hong Kong accounted for 43 percent of foreign students in Canada (figures 3.1 – 3.5).

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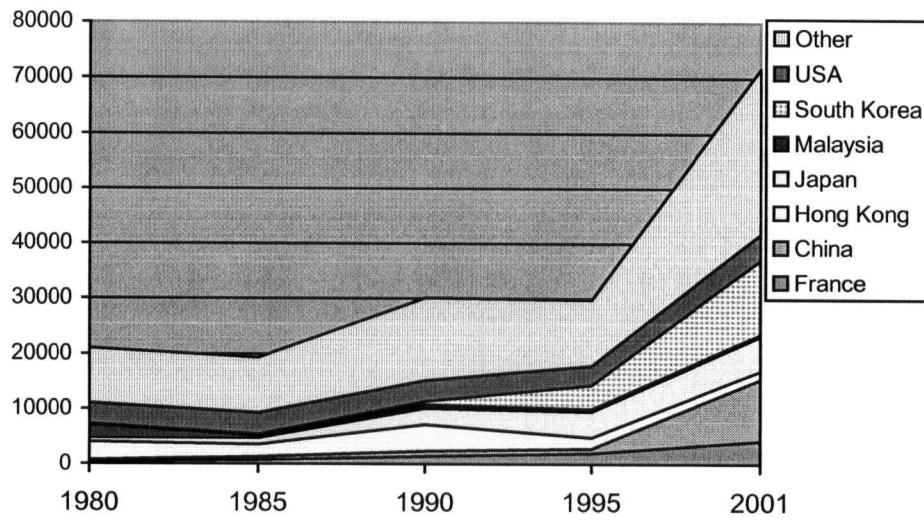
<sup>7</sup> 'Foreign Students in Canada 1980 – 2001' Report by Strategic Research and Statistics, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, January 2003.

**Figure 3.1: Foreign Student Flows and Stocks in Canada  
1980 - 2001**



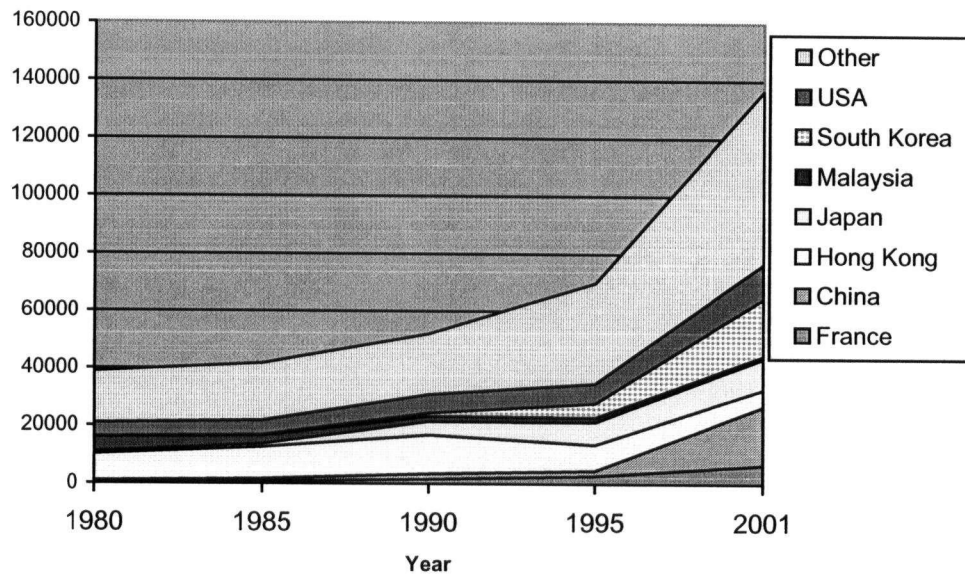
Source: CIC 2003

**Figure 3.2: Foreign Student Flows from Principal Source Countries 1980 - 2001**



Source: CIC 2003

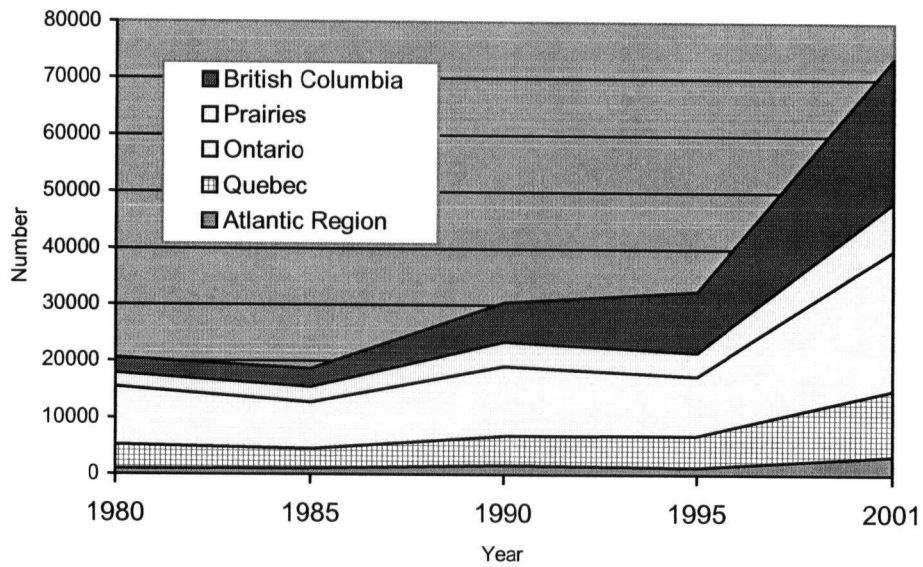
**Figure 3.3: Foreign Student Stocks from Principal Source Countries 1980 - 2001**



Source: CIC 2003

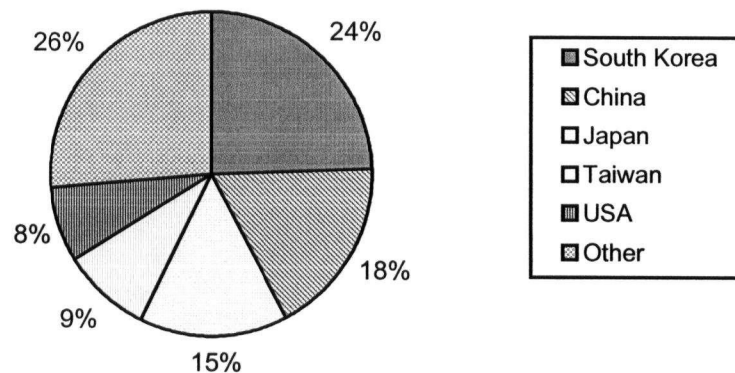
Ontario, BC and Quebec have been the top three provincial destinations of foreign students (figure 3.4). The significance of BC increased from the mid-1990s onwards and corresponds to the growing number of students from Pacific Asia. For the first time, in 2001 more students went to BC than Ontario, although Ontario still has the largest stock of students. BC also has the heaviest concentration of students from a few countries – five source countries account for almost 75 percent of the total. These students are fairly evenly spread across all levels of study (university, trade, secondary or less, and other post-secondary), although university-level slightly predominates.

**Figure 3.4: Foreign Student Flows by Destination  
Province 1980 - 2001**



Source: CIC 2003

**Figure 3.5: Foreign Student Stocks in B.C. by Top Five Source Countries 2001**



Source: CIC 2003<sup>8</sup>

Immigration policy is, of course, just one facet of attempts to internationalise education. The most comprehensive account of the range of activities by government in Canada is found in a series of recent reports produced by the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) and funded by (what was then) Human Resources and Development Canada (Walker 1999, Farquhar 2001, CBIE 2002). In *Advancing the Canadian Agenda for International Education*,<sup>9</sup> the author claims that the government has taken ‘dozens of initiatives that are responsive to [...] international education’. Yet, he goes on to say,

<sup>8</sup> The absence of Hong Kong from the top source countries of international students is striking and related, I argue, to the number of families from Hong Kong that chose to immigrate rather than send their children to Canada on student visas. The very interesting reasons for this are discussed in chapter 7.

<sup>9</sup> This report was based on a study involving interviews with 51 ‘leaders’ in government, business, education and ‘interested citizens’ across Canada.

'They are largely uncoordinated [...] emanating from a variety of sources that include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), but also such departments as Human Resources Development Canada, Industry Canada, Heritage Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Statistics Canada. [...] They are also rather low key...' (Farquhar 2001 p. 4).<sup>10</sup> This is the general tenor of existing literature on the theme of international education in Canada; whilst it is perceived as an important and worthwhile pursuit, initiatives are fragmented and piecemeal with a fundamental lack of overall strategic direction (AUCC/CECN 2000). In what follows, I provide an expanded and up-dated overview of the more pertinent details of the CBIE reports. In so doing, I hope to exemplify some of the conceptual points raised in chapter 2, particularly regarding the ways in which government has sought (or not) to place itself upon the global map of international education.

At the federal level, the internationalisation of public education would seem to be perceived through an archetypal neoliberal lens. International education represents a 'product' or a 'range of services' to be marketed to an overseas consumer. Overwhelmingly, efforts of the federal government have been directed towards the recruitment of international students. This has given a central role to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). DFAIT's activities have involved the dissemination of information about Canadian education through international trade fairs and the establishment of the 'Canadian Education Centres Network' (1995) and the

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<sup>10</sup> Activities undertaken by Human Resources and Development Canada (now HRSDC) and Industry Canada are peripherally related to international education. Since 1995, HRDC has invested substantial sums in the International Academic Mobility Initiative, enabling Canadian university students to go overseas for study, whilst Industry Canada is developing on-line learning that could be utilised in an international context.



'Education Marketing Unit' (1998) (DFAIT 2003). However, DFAIT does not directly fund educational programmes, as this is the jurisdiction of the Provinces. It is, Farquhar (2001) argues, therefore 'restricted largely to peripheral facilitative activities rather than the bolder strategic interventions that many institutional leaders deem necessary' (p. 12).

Described by DFAIT as 'a mixed enterprise with policy and commercial objectives', the Canadian Education Centres Network was established in 1995 as the result of an agreement between DFAIT, CIDA, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APFC). Its primary objective has been the implementation of international marketing activities. In 2003, CECN consisted of 17 centres, located throughout Asia, Latin America and Europe and serving 290 'Canadian clients' including universities, colleges, primary and secondary schools and language schools (CECN 2003). It began as a *publicly* funded initiative and continues today as a *private*, non-profit company, characteristic of the blurring of the public and private sectors under the directive of neoliberalism. Between 1995 and 2000 DFAIT and CIDA contributed \$16 million to establish the network and revenue was raised through fees (charged to educational institutions), through education fairs and also through the \$1.5 million in 'contracts involving the sale of educational and training services to foreign clients' (DFAIT 1999).

The CECN aims to 'provide Canadian education institutions with professional assistance in marketing their services and products', to 'seek well qualified, fee paying students', to assist Canadian institutions in establishing links with overseas institutions and to 'achieve substantial progress towards cost recovery' (DFAIT 1999). The goals of the network are both economic and symbolic, concerned with the 'business' of

international education and the creation, therein, of distinctive international presence. As the following extract (taken from a report evaluating the success of the network) underscores, international education is of (at least) nominal importance at the level of the federal government in Canada, necessitating a pro-active approach to the creation of a distinctively Canadian educational 'product':

'[...]given the fact that international competition is well organized and is intent on capturing a larger and larger share of the market, Canada can confidently affirm that it is in the public interest to become involved in the international marketing of educational services and to assist the sector in its efforts to recruit more foreign students. The economic benefits justify the Government's investment and involvement. Indeed, the stakes are so large that it is essential that all of the government players involved in education must together determine the type of involvement and integrated approach needed.

Canada's competitors are not only well-financed but are perceived to integrate their efforts not only with respect to marketing to students, but also with respect to educational projects, scholarships, academic and cultural exchanges, tourism and promotional airfares. These are all part of their efforts to promote their countries abroad. In the face of such competition, Canada has something to sell in the international market place...' (DFAIT 1999)

Thus, at the level of the federal government in Canada, as I have shown, education is evidently conceived in strongly commercial terms. The gradually marked shift in the meaning of national education away from the nation-building concerns of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century would seem to have occurred (Barrow 1990, Brown 1995). Although in Canada education remains under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government has enthusiastically championed marketisation as part of a more general embrace of neoliberal ideology (Mitchell 2003); the national state perceives great gains inherent in educating students from beyond its borders. International education inevitably raises

questions concerning the role of the nation-state in the social reproduction of transnational citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mitchell 2003).

### **Provincial initiatives on international education**

‘There are considerable differences among the provinces in the philosophies, mechanisms and foci of these efforts, and they are proceeding quite independently of one another – after all, *they are in competition for shares in the international student market*, whose economic impact they understand’ (Farquhar 2001, p. 15, emphasis added).

As Farquhar’s comments suggest, provincial-level approaches to international education are autonomous and directly competitive. They are also unambiguously concerned with the revenue-generating potential of internationalisation, as the following statement by the ‘British Columbia Centre for International Education’ makes plain:

‘International education generates significant revenue for Canada, British Columbia and the public post-secondary institutions in the province. In Canada international education generates more than \$2.5 billion per year – the equivalent of 27, 500 jobs. The BC portion of the market is in excess of \$200 million boosting it beyond commercial fishing in terms of economic importance to BC.’ (BCCIE 2003)<sup>11</sup>

The CIBE (2001) report provides several examples of the active involvement of the provincial government in international education. In 2000, the Department of Education in Manitoba founded the ‘Manitoba Council for International Education’ - a ‘consortium of fee-paying members’ that included public schools, higher education institutions and private educational providers, with the primary aim of coordinating joint marketing activities (Farquhar 2001, p. 16). In New Brunswick, the Provincial government has established and continues to fund the ‘Universities International Centre’ for recruiting

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<sup>11</sup> [www.bccie.bc.ca/bccie/about/importance.asp](http://www.bccie.bc.ca/bccie/about/importance.asp), accessed 09/06/04.

international students and promoting the 'New Brunswick-"branded" umbrella' overseas (Farquhar 2001, p. 16). Alberta's 'International Education Strategy' has resulted in the 'Alberta Centre for International Education', comprising partnerships between public and private secondary and post-secondary institutions. According to Farquhar (2001) it 'operates almost exclusively as a joint marketing agency' (p. 17), extracting fees from its member institutions. And Quebec, also, has recently announced the launch of a 'comprehensive plan to stimulate international [educational] activities' - the 'Programme pour l'Internationalisation de l'Education Québécoise.' All of these Provincial initiatives signify collaborations between 'multiple stakeholders' (Farquhar 2001), intersecting public and private interests with an overriding economic motive.

The 'British Columbia Centre for International Education' is the longest running of all Provincial initiatives in Canada, established in 1990 as a consortium of post-secondary institutions and funded by the BC Ministry of Education. It is a non-profit society governed by a Board of Directors 'that includes educators and representatives from government and business' and its membership comprises all 27 public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia (BCCIE 2003). Figure 3.6 outlines the key claims of the BCCIE, enabling me to underline a few general points regarding the transformation of post-secondary public education at the provincial level in Canada.

As is evident in the language contained in figure 3.6, the province is explicitly concerned with the *financial* potential of internationalisation, embracing the concept of 'marketisation'. It can be seen how such initiatives further the development of an internationally differentiated market for education: the BCCIE is tasked with creating a distinguished 'brand image' for provincial education, described in terms of 'educational

products and services'. It highlights, as Mitchell (2003) has argued, a pervasive concern with the skills and attributes necessary to work in a global market: 'the imperative to create hierarchically conditioned, globally oriented state subjects – i.e. individuals oriented to excel in ever transforming situations of global competition' (p. 388). The evident interest in benchmarking and quality assessment measures is characteristic of the application of neoliberal economic tools to education systems globally, as described in chapter 2, and facilitates global differentiation through the appearance of 'quality'. And finally, the BCCIE is attempting to forge a number of different international and trans-local connections – sometimes involving the federal government and sometimes bypassing it.

**Figure 3.6: British Columbia Centre for International Education initiatives (BCCIE 2003)**

**Strengthening the promotion of BC post-secondary training and education services world-wide. Examples include:**

Initiating a comprehensive provincial international student marketing strategy to identify strategies for improved market effectiveness

Conducting research in new markets, identifying key contacts and strategies for increasing market share

Compiling and analysing statistics and producing and circulating reports to the BC system

**Coordinating system-based approach to international projects and contracts. Examples include:**

Promoting BC educational products and services through [...] expertise database, and distributing brochures showcasing the system's project and consulting expertise

Hosting and coordinating incoming missions

Strengthening connections with International Financial Institutions by participating in Canadian education sector trade missions to the WB, IDB

**Initiating research, developing resources and providing professional development. Examples include:**

Conducting an Internationalization Quality Review pilot supporting a process to assess the quality of an institution's approach to internationalisation

Conducting a research project to identify the international knowledge, skills and abilities that BC post-secondary graduates need to live and work in today's global environment

**Establishing and strengthening connections around the world. Examples include:**

Participating in key events (Team Canada, World Education Market, Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers)

Hosting an international roundtable of educational, governmental and organizational representatives from across Asia and Canada to discuss student and faculty mobility

Perhaps the most interesting and innovative initiative to be undertaken at the provincial level has involved the certification of overseas schools. At present, Ontario has eleven so-called 'offshore schools', Nova Scotia has two, New Brunswick has one, and Alberta, according to one source, is 'just getting started'. An interview with James Beeke, the British Columbia Ministry of Education Inspector of Independent Schools, provided some substantial information on the recently initiated British Columbia 'offshore school certification program', which it is his responsibility to oversee.

**British Columbia's Offshore School Certification Program offers the opportunity to international students to receive a British Columbia Ministry of Education certified education program in their native country. The program is taught in English by BC-certified teachers and its graduates are issued British Columbia High School Graduation Certificates.<sup>12</sup>**

The first (and, at the time of the interview, the only) overseas school offering a BC certified education programme is found in Liaoning Province, China. The Dalian Maple Leaf International School began in 1997 as a pilot project, following the signing of a 'Memorandum of Understanding' between the Chinese Province and British Columbia. It has since raised the profile of BC education considerably; student enrolment in the programme has risen from 55 (in 1997) to 1, 300 in 2003. The certification process is currently in progress for several additional schools:

**We have four candidate inspections next week and the week after. We may have two more certified schools by spring and another nine schools ready for candidate status inspection this fall...We are working with twenty-one schools at some stage of the process: one in Egypt, one in Taiwan, two in Japan, and the rest in the PRC.**

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<sup>12</sup> All quotations are taken from an interview conducted at the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools at the Ministry of Education, Victoria, BC, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

This project reflects wider concepts around education and globalisation, and the influence of neoliberal ideology. The Inspector describes 'three key players' in the offshore school program: the Ministry of Education (specifically the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools), the offshore school itself, and the 'consultant or service provider'. Each has a different, pivotal role to play in the process. The Ministry's role is, in the following order, to establish the certification requirements, to conduct inspections of the schools requesting certification, to certify their educational programme, to distribute and mark Grade 12 provincial exams, and, finally, to issue transcripts and diplomas to graduates. The school is required to establish and operate a programme that meets the criteria of the BC Ministry of Education, to provide for annual on-site inspections by representatives of the Ministry, and to pay all the programme and inspection fees.

The third party in this relationship is the so-called 'consultant' or 'service provider', and it is in this aspect that the commercial intent of the programme is really brought to the fore. The consultant can take a number of guises: a 'public school district company', an independent school, or a retired 'BC educator' and will have diverse roles to fill, providing administrative guidance to the overseas school, aiding the development of policy and curriculum, giving advice on the purchasing of educational materials, and helping to recruit the necessary BC-certified principals and teachers. They will also give the school direct guidance in completing the required Ministry documents. The private consultant is, in effect, the key mediator between the overseas school and the BC Ministry of Education and the assurance that the school will pass the certification test. The Ministry carries a list of 'approved' or 'recognised' private service providers, thereby



maintaining significant control over this process. Beeke here describes the concept behind the 'public school board company':

**The school act was changed last year to enable a school district to establish a company. There are six or seven in BC that have done that. They've established a for-profit company, but it's a unique company where the profits can only flow to the school district. So under that company they could approach schools in China saying 'we would be able to offer this service, this is what it would cost you'...And they formulate their own contract between [themselves and] the schools.**

In order to qualify as a certified offshore school, a number of requirements must be met. The local Chinese (or other) educational authorities have to prove that all courses are taught in English and that the teachers and principal are 'BC certified'. Presently there are seventy-two BC teachers working at the Dalian school; there must be a 'well-developed plan outlining instructional time and learning outcomes and sufficient courses to enable students to graduate from Grade 12'; and the students must be able to pass Grade 12 provincial examinations just as any other student in British Columbia (*Interview with James Beeke, 2003*).

Each prospective school will undergo a specific certification process, involving an application (which must then be selected by the Inspector), an informal visit/review to establish 'candidate status' (costing the school CA\$2,500), followed by a formal inspection by a larger team of people to establish 'certification status' (costing CA\$3,500 in addition to all the 'inspection costs'). The school must also pay for ongoing inspections, in order to maintain its certification status. The Ministry of Education requires an additional \$350 per student per year enrolled in the BC programme.

There have been a number of developments, the Inspector told me, since the beginning of the pilot project. Ministry of Education officials have made “successful” visits to eight Chinese Provinces, accompanied by Provincial and National PRC Officials. In November 2003 BC Premier Gordon Campbell signed a ‘memorandum of understanding’ with the Chinese Minister of Education, declaring the intention to work together in future educational ventures.

The implications of this initiative for the internationalisation of education and the emergent geographies of cultural capital are, I would suggest, significant. One of the more unexpected findings has involved the apparent intersection of vigorous entrepreneurial strategies undertaken by the BC Ministry with consideration of the local impacts for BC provincial schools. As the Inspector explained, the Ministry is investigating the potential of an extension to the offshore programme:

**In short term, there is a declining school age population in the province, significantly declining. School closures etc. etc. How can we maintain programmes for our own students? What are we going to do with all the surplus teachers?**

The Ministry plans to present future offshore schools with the offer of hiring certified teachers from BC for grades 10 and 12. For grade 11, they will suggest that the students are sent to Canada:

**Now every year I’ve got 500 kids coming to my school district. That will fill up my school. Oh, and by the way, for that year we charge \$15, 000 each for the 500 kids. I’ve got 500 kids every year and your multiply it by \$15, 000 each.... That’s in the making.**

The offshore programme, then, is partly conceived as an answer to local concerns, enabling the utilisation of existing school buildings and equipment, bringing in substantial and consistent funds, and replacing a declining domestic enrolment:

**There's quite a profit margin now. Say if I take in \$15, 000 per student. It costs on a provincial average about \$6, 700 dollars to educate a student here. So you've got quite a profit margin to start with. So now I could use that money to keep my orchestra going that otherwise I would have to cut, or maybe some extra-curricula programmes that otherwise I would have to cut. Or maybe I can use it to keep my class size down a bit. However the school board wants to do that, it now gives them some more dollars to operate their dollars with.**

The overseas certification programme conceivably represents a new stage in the geographical transformation of education through internationalisation and a re-scaling of the politics of education, as strategic linkages are established between regions, localities, and individual institutions, circumventing direct national control at both ends of the transnational connection. In the short term, strategic links between the BC Ministry of Education and particular schools within China bring direct economic benefits to the province. They also benefit its higher education institutions, as these schools act as direct 'feeders': 100 percent of the Dalian School's graduating class last year applied to attend a Canadian university. There are longer-term benefits, also. As the Inspector informed me, the programme is an explicit attempt to establish enduring social and economic linkages; he spoke of the active creation of, as Granovetter (1973) terms, 'weak ties', which would be of long-standing benefit to BC as China 'opens to the West':

**[In China] You do business with who you know. You can write things down on paper, but really it's who you know and who you trust, that's who you do business with. Now, if you have a number of key young people and they are going to be going back to take key positions in government and business, and**

**they are part of a 3 year programme with BC teachers doing a BC programme, who do they get to know? And when they want to go to university where are they going to want to go to university? And when they graduate, who are they first going to turn to when they look for business linkages? Ahh, so, what's the benefit to BC? Probably huge.**

Agreements established between the province of BC and the Chinese government demonstrate the convergence of spatial scales characteristic of emergent forms of international education. Agreements have also been established between the Canadian federal government and individual provinces. Alberta, for example, has recently signed a protocol with the federal government wherein it was agreed that the issuing of study permits would be streamlined for certain receiving universities. BC has a different arrangement with the federal government:

**We had a meeting with the Director, and the Manager over the offices that approve study permits to Canada...**

Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Mr. Beeke claims, is constantly faced with fraudulent applications for study permits, involving false reporting of English ability, academic ability, and finances necessary to sustain overseas study. The offshore schools, however, offer a potential panacea. Put in place in 2002, it has been agreed with the federal government that the BC Ministry will write a letter on behalf of students in the overseas programme, which will then become part of their visa application. In Beeke's view:

**We've got a win-win. I can give you [Citizenship and Immigration Canada] more reliable indicators in each of those areas at no cost to your embassy staff [and] no time - they don't have to check a thing. Because we've worked with these kids for 3 years, with BC certified teachers. I will be able to certify for you**

**as BC Minister for Education more reliable indicators than you've ever been able to get...**

The Ministry is confident that it can guarantee not only the academic aptitude of its overseas students but also their English ability and their 'financial commitment' to paying (what can amount to substantial) international tuition fees at Canadian universities. Yet, a very different view on these schools has emerged recently in a report in *The Vancouver Sun* (Bhatty 2004). It describes the complaints of one teacher who spent a year teaching at a newly-accredited BC school in Shanghai, which began offering the BC certificate at the end of September 2003. The report says: 'Doug Roy left Shanghai last week, frustrated that most of the students admitted to the school couldn't speak a word of English...He said the school granted admission to 'whoever's daddy has enough money to pay for it'.' Roy claims that two-thirds of the students did not have sufficient English ability to complete the course.

More generally, the implications inherent in this example, embodying a new frontier in international education, are representative of the most significant repercussions of the internationalisation of education arising from the influence of neoliberal ideology and related international student mobility: *the perpetuation of local social stratification through educational exclusion and the creation of a new class of transnational cosmopolitan elites*. In Dalian, the US\$5,000 annual tuition fees will mean that inevitably only the children of the wealthiest families can hope to attend the Canadian Maple Leaf School. In addition to the cultural capital inherent in the acquisition of a 'Western' high school certificate, there is a further, crucial benefit to attending this school: access to a Canadian study permit is virtually guaranteed. Last year the Dalian Maple Leaf School

graduated 101 students; *96 percent were successful* in getting student visas compared to 55 percent of all applications for China as a whole (Beeke 2003). This statistic is alone suggestive of the social exclusionary tendencies embedded in the practices of international education. Furthermore, as Mr. Beeke pointed out, it is assumed that these BC-educated students will, after graduating from a Canadian university, return to China to take up the most prestigious positions in Chinese society. The potential for *devaluing locally conferred educational credentials* is again evident in this process. I will draw out these implications in much more detail in later chapters, when I discuss the impact of the ‘overseas education’ upon the employment experiences of returnee graduates in Hong Kong. Here I move on to discuss the international initiatives of one district school board in Vancouver, providing further examples of the internationalisation of education at a different spatial scale.

### **Municipal initiatives: Vancouver School Board**

At the municipal level within British Columbia, the internationalisation of public primary and secondary education is organised and centralised through the school boards. About 40 school districts in BC are currently operating an international student programme of some sort, and they come together four or five times a year to discuss common issues and concerns under the banner of ‘IPSEA’ (International Public Secondary Educational Association).<sup>13</sup>

Here I undertake an examination of one of the largest school districts in western Canada, the Vancouver School Board (VSB), drawing upon data obtained through an

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.studyinbc.org/ipsea.htm>

interview with Barbara Onstad, the full-time manager of its international programme.<sup>14</sup> Vancouver School Board's 'International Education Program' began in 1985, as the first secondary-level programme in Canada.<sup>15</sup> The meaning of international education has been transformed over this time, according to Ms. Onstad, so that 'It is much, much more competitive and much more sophisticated than it was in those days'. In what follows, I describe the main aspects of the International Education Program, before discussing some of the strategies employed by the school board vis-à-vis the internationalisation of district-level education.

The programme comprises several principal components. The one-year study course presently has over 900 students from 16 different countries, attending all of the 18 public secondary schools, 22 elementary schools, and 3 of the adult education centres in the Vancouver district. In addition, the school board offers a variety of summer schools that, for the past fifteen years, have been provided to groups of international students from particular countries. This policy has changed in the last three years; perceiving the demand (and financial potential), VSB has decided to extend the offer to individuals, who then attend summer school alongside local students. Up until recently, the education programme has also included district international exchanges with Seoul, Guangzhou and Yokohama, which are now threatened by overseas budget cuts. And finally, the board offers longer-term study, including the International Baccalaureate Program and secondary school graduation. As Table 3.1 demonstrates, the VSB has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of international students undertaking long-term study in the Vancouver district.

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<sup>14</sup> The interview on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2003 has been conducted in addition to attendance at a parental open-day, and inspection of the VSB's promotional literature.

<sup>15</sup> The district of New Westminster established a similar programme around the same time.

Since 2000, the Board has admitted elementary-level students (aged 5 to 12 years) with the stipulation that they must live with parents or a close family member whilst in Vancouver. Ms. Onstad pointed out, however, that these younger students are not actively recruited – ‘it’s merely [us] creating a structure for the demand’. A huge 95 percent of these elementary students are from South Korea – a pattern found throughout Canada and Australia. There is clearly a very distinctive global geography of international schooling for the youngest of children.

**Table 3.1: VSB Statistics of International Student Numbers <sup>16</sup>**

School Year	# International Students
<b>1999 – 2000</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>2000 – 2001</b>	<b>427</b>
<b>2001 – 2002</b>	<b>613</b>
<b>2002 – 2003</b>	<b>842</b>

Source: Vancouver School Board

There are, Ms. Onstad admits, ‘big financial gains’ to be had for the Vancouver school district, as the fees for international schooling attest. The school board charges

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<sup>16</sup> Year 2000 onwards includes elementary students for the first time in addition to secondary level students.



CA\$11,000 a year for elementary and secondary programmes, \$1,100 a month for short-term programmes, with health insurance adding an additional \$650 a year to the overall cost. The application fee is \$200 for elementary and secondary and \$100 for short-term studies. Unlike the BCCIE statement, however, Ms. Onstad also mentioned the 'cultural benefits' that international students bring to local schools; international students are more than just a 'cash cow' for local school boards.

I will now turn to discuss further some points of interest to have emerged from the interview with Barbara Onstad, several of which paralleled the issues raised by James Beeke, the BC Inspector for Independent Schools. The first relates to the perception that international students offer a solution to the various contemporary problems confronted by local schools within the Vancouver district. As noted by Mr. Beeke for BC, generally both primary and secondary schools have seen a marked decrease in domestic enrolments over the last few years. Furthermore, this trend has tended to focus on *certain* catchment areas. The VSB has been able to use the placement of international students strategically, filling these gaps in enrolment and thereby securing the funding of particular schools, enabling them to maintain programmes or avoid cutbacks in staffing that may have otherwise resulted. As she indicates here:

**It's a benefit to the school. They can say to us, 'we are expecting a really low intake this year so can you send us x number...twenty, forty international students?' And when that happens and the funding that they get makes that school able to maintain programmes that might otherwise have been cancelled...that has become increasingly another important aspect of having international students in our district.**

Schools get an 'enriched staffing' formula based on the number of international students they can accommodate, providing the funding for a greater staff to pupil ratio, as well as 'multicultural' and 'student support' staff.

Also paralleling the provincial experience, the VSB initiatives draw attention to the ways in which international education involves the transcending of spatial scales, in addition to the increasing dependence of particular localities upon the fortunes and ongoing cooperation of countries across the Pacific Ocean, tying them into a series of transnational/trans-local social and political relations.

**The fact is if there was an economic crash in Korea tomorrow it would devastate every single international programme in Canada, every district, every university and college. So it is driven by factors completely out of our control, as much as we would like to think that we are wonderful at our promotional aspects. *Laughs***

Thirdly, as just indicated, the school board undertakes various commercial activities overseas:

**Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea are the top countries right now...we try to maintain a presence there, try to make it easy for people to reach us and get our information.**

Interestingly, the VSB also targets countries 'where those stereotypes about our schools don't exist', implying with this statement the geography of international education and the variable perception of local cultural capital globally. This, I was told, is a strategy to fill enrolment gaps in the less 'desirable' schools in the district; countries such as Mexico, Thailand, Germany and Malaysia are the targets of this

particular scheme. Other overseas activities described include attending education fairs, holding parent seminars ('from time to time'), distributing promotional materials at agents' seminars, and administering English tests. Their web site, Ms. Onstad stressed, is multi-lingual, and their published materials come in seven different languages. The school board is acutely aware of the important social ties held by immigrant groups already present in Vancouver, and tries to utilise these to good effect with four or five annual seminars targeting family members (again, offered in different languages). She said: 'It's a word-of-mouth kind of thing and it's the most powerful of any of our promotional tools'.

The entrepreneurial activities of the VSB extend to the use of local private agents to aid with the student recruitment process. I asked:

*JW: Do you deal with private agents?*

**Everyone, everyone has to deal with agents in some way, who has an international student programme. Everyone does. All institutions in Canada are dealing with agents in some way, shape or form. Even if you say 'we don't deal with agents', meaning you don't pay commission to agents, you still have agents bringing forward applications on behalf of their clients. And the clients are paying the agents to do that. We know it because most people do a place on the application form that says how did you find out about our programme, referred by agent, and we know people are using agents to put in their applications...And so the Vancouver School Board's dealings with agents, how we decided to approach agents and work with agents, is particular to the market and particular to our own recruitment goals, you could say. So in our case, we always have some schools that asked us for a particular number of international students and didn't get that number. And so our goal is to find as many international students for those schools that would like to have them. So our basis for agency agreements, we just take that list of schools from the previous year that didn't get enough international students and we will pay commission, 10 percent commission to agents who refer students to one of those schools only. So we don't pay commission to agencies who are referring students to schools which we know will meet their needs [student targets], and we also don't for any elementary students, no matter where they are going.**

The use of agents by public school districts exemplifies the entrepreneurial bent of recent international activities.

I was interested to find out about the school board's perspective on the relationship between different levels of government in international education in Canada. Ms. Onstad offered the following reflections:

**From an institutional point of view we are all very disappointed with the Canadian Education Centre Network. The [federal] government has pulled away the funding, and institutions pay \$6,000 a year just to be able to access the CEC network, and they charge about \$3,000 per [educational] fair for participation. It's big money from all of the institutions...Aside from CEC there is no good linkage between federal government and certainly any secondary school efforts to recruit international students...**

She bemoaned a 'complete lack of consultation' regarding the recent changes to immigration policy, particularly in respect of the decision by CIC to remove the study permit for programmes of one year or less. This federal-level policy contradicts policy at the district level, where students are still required to obtain a study permit for any length of course, as this offers some guarantee of custodianship.<sup>17</sup> The complaints of the VSB were unheeded by higher levels of government, and the district has decided to maintain its policy regardless. Ms. Onstad summed up her feelings about federal-level involvement in their international education initiatives with:

**They [the federal government] have a complete lack of awareness of the extent of the international student programme at the secondary level anywhere in Canada.**

In contrast, the provincial government does take an (albeit circumscribed) interest:

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<sup>17</sup> To get a study permit young students have to show evidence of a local custodian.

**Their motivation is definitely the money that they don't have to give to the school districts...[although] their support [for the international education programme] is verbal. *Laughs***

As indicated here, the school board approach to internationalisation can be seen as a partial consequence of legislation passed in 1998, which transferred control over the financing of education to the provinces (Mitchell 2003). The constant threat of under-funding has therefore necessitated such entrepreneurial strategies by district school boards.

### **Institutional initiatives: the University of British Columbia**

Finally, I now turn to examine some initiatives towards internationalisation undertaken at the level of the higher education institution. In a report produced by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC 2000) it was observed that the relative size of universities has generally militated against a centralised, organised approach, whereas 'colleges tend to be more entrepreneurially involved in international education' (p. 20). Focussing on universities, the report concludes that although an 'international dimension' can be found within most mission statements, very few 'approach internationalisation as a process of institution-wide renewal' (p. 20). Universities, the report suggests, are 'loose collections of rather autonomous Faculties, Departments and individuals, some of which may be committed to international education while others fail to see its relevance or importance.' (p. 20). In what follows I examine the approach to internationalisation recently undertaken by the University of

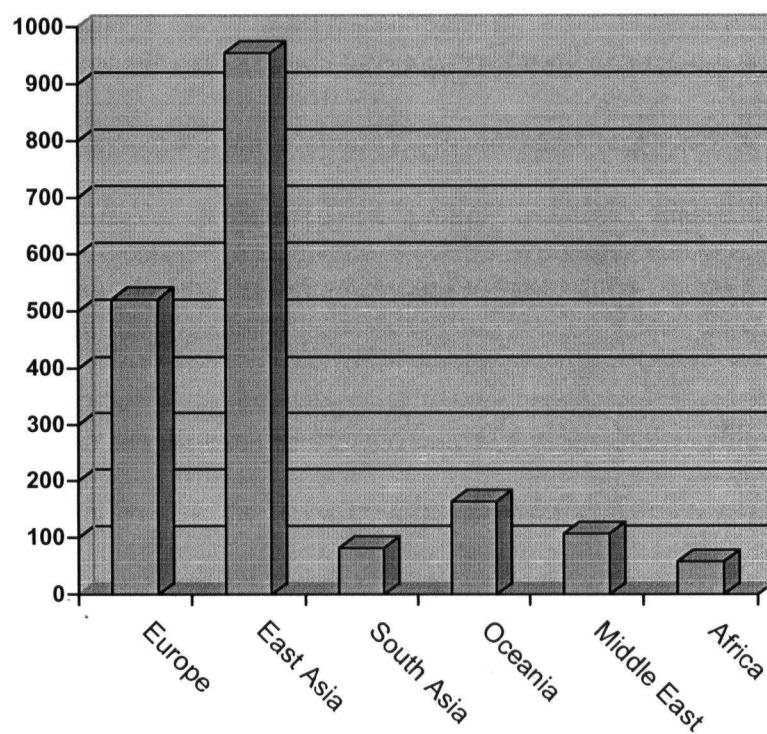
British Columbia (UBC), the province's largest university and the third largest university in Canada.

In the 2000 'Winter Session', UBC had a total of 35, 248 students: 28, 811 undergraduates and 6, 437 graduates. The most subscribed subject areas for full time undergraduate students were Arts (7, 288), Science (5, 073), Engineering (2, 596), and Commerce (1, 449). There were 2, 291 international students registered for this session. The areas of origin are shown in figures 19 and 20. No data were available from UBC about the countries of origin of the whole student body. The figures, therefore, exclude a significant number of immigrant and naturalised Canadian students who are, as I will show later in the thesis, often equally motivated by education-related considerations in their decision to relocate to Canada. One indication of this 'invisible' group is found in the alumni associations; the Hong Kong-UBC alumni association has over 1,000 members outside of Canada, and claims to be one of the largest and most active of all the UBC alumni groups.<sup>18</sup>

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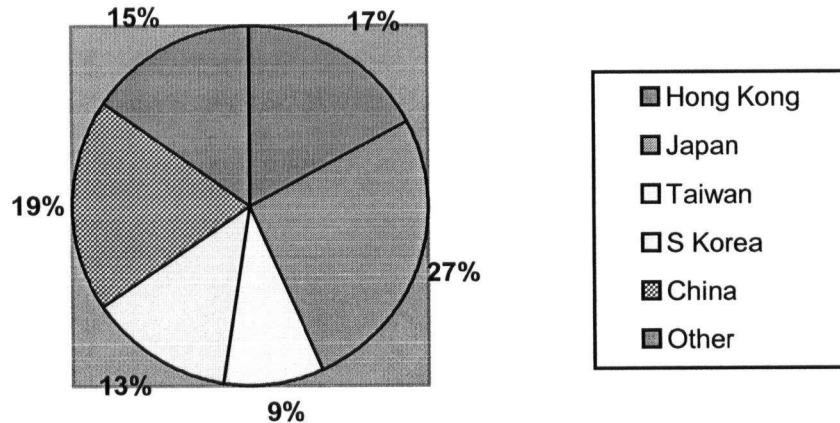
<sup>18</sup> [www.ubcalumni.com.hk](http://www.ubcalumni.com.hk)

**Figure 3.7: UBC International Students (2000)**  
**Area of Origin**



Source: UBC Statistics

**Figure 3.8: UBC International Students from East Asia 2000**



Source: UBC statistics

UBC is involved in several relatively high-profile international activities at the institutional level: the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), the Canada-China “3x3” University Partnership, an IMBA program and Universitas 21, in addition to a variety of international exchange agreements with universities throughout Europe and Asia.

The APRU is an example of regional, transnational collaboration between institutions in international education, characteristic of many other recent changes in scaling of international education in the way in which it circumvents nation-state involvement. It comprises the chief executive officers of 35 ‘premier research universities’ around the Pacific Rim, who meet annually at a different university campus, with the objective of



developing ‘an increasingly integrated Pacific Rim community’.<sup>19</sup> In many ways similar, the “3x3” was established in 1994 as an agreement between the presidents of UBC, McGill and the University of Toronto in Canada and the presidents of Nankai University, Peking University and Tsinghua University in China. The University of Montreal joined shortly after. The activities of the APRU as described by UBC have interesting implications for emergent geographies of international education and the reconfiguration of geographical scales and boundaries that this entails. The language used is particularly indicative:

‘It is envisioned that the partner universities will operate, at least in targeted areas, as a single entity with flexible, permeable boundaries supporting the particular research and educational activities. This kind of activity will redefine the institutional cultures in such a way that the community of the member institutions will view internationalisation as a necessary path to excellence.’<sup>20</sup>

The APRU operates independently of the nation-states containing its member institutions, underlining the transition in education away from national, nation-building objectives towards the establishing of linkages in a transnational social, economic and political space. A new IMBA programme has been launched in co-operation with the School of Management at Shanghai Jiao Tong University.<sup>21</sup> Under this programme, students can earn a UBC International Master of Business Administration degree in Shanghai, offered on a part-time basis over 24 months.

The international activities undertaken at UBC are centralised by the International Office. I interviewed the newly appointed Director of the International Office, Dr. Ken

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<sup>19</sup> Available on the official UBC International Office Website: <http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/ubcintl/>

<sup>20</sup> Available on the official UBC International Office Website: <http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/ubcintl/>

<sup>21</sup> See [www.ubcalumni.com.hk](http://www.ubcalumni.com.hk)

McGillivray, about institutional objectives vis-à-vis international education in the wider national and international context.<sup>22</sup> The analysis he provides supports the general claim that Canada lacks the coordinated effort needed for the successful development of international education, at all levels. The absence of planning and strategy at the level of the university, he suggests, is a consequence of the 'culture of the institution': 'It's about getting institutions to think institutionally, as well as at the departmental, faculty and individual level.' The cultural shift in the university towards internationalisation (Barrow 1990, Burbules and Torres 2000) has clearly yet to impact all academic staff, some of whom remain 'happily ignorant' of such broader institutional objectives. What this also shows, however, is that universal neoliberal 'models' are differentially implemented through the activities (or in-activities) of *individuals* and, as McGillivray notes, dependent upon the localised *culture of institutions*. In some academic writing, at least, it is perhaps ironic that the 'universal logic' of neoliberal ideology is paralleled in the universal application of the concept of neoliberalism to diverse empirical circumstances. Clearly, there are significant trends associated with neoliberalism and internationalisation, but there are also problems with its sweeping application and the implication that neoliberalism equates to a diminished role for the nation-state in everyday life. The very nature of the nation-state system in Canada has prevented, for example, the pursuit of a general and coordinated international educational agenda, in contrast to the UK. Dr. McGillivray describes the work of the British Council as an exemplary form of coordinated internationalisation:

**I think...the federal government is in a very awkward position in this country because it doesn't have the mandate for education. That's a provincial**

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<sup>22</sup> Interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

jurisdiction. And so all provinces, despite the fact that there are thematic threads, approach this slightly differently...The feds have a responsibility because of their network through DFAIT abroad to deliver messages as far as Canadian education is concerned, but even then they are crippled to a certain extent because they developed Canadian Education Centres which were initially a DFAIT funded operation, which was then to be self-supporting after a certain period of time...It's *still* not self-supporting...and this was to promote Canadian education abroad, and many embassies provided space in their embassies or consulates or offices for the CEC, and it's acted in certain ways as an ambassador for Canadian education. But, we are...sadly lacking in both federal resources and to a certain extent provincial resources too, to really promote Canada abroad. Certainly the Australians and the Brits are light-years ahead of us. Well, you know, the Brits have been in this a long time. The British Council has been set up specifically for advocating British education and culture abroad. It's a big time operation.

I relayed my recent experience at an international education fair in Hong Kong, where the lack of a Canadian presence was conspicuous. He responds:

And this is part of our agony. You know, you've got ten different provinces handling it in, I would say, ten different ways. If Nova Scotia's not there, maybe Ontario will be there, Manitoba might be there, BC maybe, depending on where it [the fair] is. So the impression created of Canada by individuals is that they sort of get it piecemeal. They know Canada by institutions...so they know, maybe, McGill, University of Toronto, Queens, UBC...umm...beyond that there's not much recognition [...] Certainly the mid-sized institutions are a bit bitter because there's no federal money or provincial money available to recruit, so it's basically what you can do yourself, and that's largely based on the amount of money you can bring in, in terms of students.

His interview raises several interesting points around the importance of international competitiveness, and the financial imperatives attached to international student recruitment. The role of his office, as he describes it, is to *manage* internationalisation at the level of the university:

...to develop both policy and procedure to ensure that the internationalisation of the university is moving forward in a managed way...leading to better managed internationalisation.

He also gave a clear sense of his perception of the global geography of international education, and voiced his criticism of the infamous 'Australian model' of international student recruitment:

**There is the Australian model, which I'm not sure we want to go to. I think it's gone over the other side in terms of attracting so many international students as really a cash cow, to their programmes, and they are now so dependent on them that they have to be out there recruiting because their money largely...really is being injected into domestic programmes in order to make those operate and work. Now that's perhaps a rather gross generalisation, but it's none the less quite accurate that some institutions have really become quite dependent on international students.**

**At the same time there have to be accommodations made in some of the programmes, and I would argue too that the quality of some of the programmes – not all of the programmes – in Australia's educational system are somewhat suspect. And the UK have found this too, and they've established new quality control measures for international programmes or collaborative programmes that any of their universities are doing abroad to assure that they are of the highest quality...**

At the level of the individual institution, as this example has shown, the intersection of neoliberal ideology with the objectives and practices of internationalisation is apparent: a central concern with the financial potential of international students, the consequent implementation of various strategies designed to 'market' the university to an overseas audience, a clear sense of the main 'competitors' in the market, as well as overt attempts to meet externally imposed quality assessment measures. In this section as a whole, I have so far suggested some of the ways in which 'internationalism' as ideology and 'internationalisation' as both discourse and practice have impacted many aspects of education systems of particular countries and at multiple spatial scales.

I have so far only hinted at some of the implications of the processes here described for the geography of social experience; in the remainder of this thesis, these concerns will be brought to the fore. In chapters 4 and 5, I present a theoretical argument linking international education and family migration to cultural capital acquisition and the reproduction of social privilege. In chapters 6, 7 and 8 I attempt to render explicit the links between the neoliberal transformation of education, 'internationalisation' and the exercise of educational 'choice' through spatial mobility with a detailed empirical exploration of the education and migration experiences of students, graduates and their families moving between Vancouver and Hong Kong.

**INTRODUCTION TO SECTION TWO**  
**MIGRATION FOR EDUCATION: THE ACCUMULATION OF**  
**CULTURAL CAPITAL AND ITS USES**

‘But the point is that for many middle-class parents travel and distance emerge as contingent factors [in educational decisions], not priority or determinate ones’ (Ball et al. 1995, p. 65)

‘I have quite a few friends who have children who are either extremely gifted or have a little bit of a problem back in Taiwan. Therefore their parents would want them to study overseas.’ (*Interview with Ms. Ng; private educational consultant, Vancouver*)

‘To Asian parents the word university is magic. The word college has no appeal. Absolutely none.’ (*Interview with Dr. Peters; principal of private college, Vancouver*)

As I observed in chapter 1, this section entails a shift in scale and methodology, from the analysis of the internationalisation of education in terms of large-scale population movements, institutions, globalising organisations and dominating ideologies at various spatial scales in Section One, to a detailed exploration of the meanings attached to international education from the perspective of individual migrant students and their families. This exploration necessitated a primarily qualitative research methodology. In this introduction I provide a brief overview of the methods used and key characteristics of my research participants.

Over five months during 2003, I interviewed 50 current immigrant or international students in post-secondary education in the Vancouver area. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was semi-structured in format; 48 interviews were conducted on the campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC). Each research participant was also given a short questionnaire to complete. Two primary routes were used to make

contact with students: through an advertisement placed around the UBC campus and also through personal contacts within the immigrant (Hong Kong and PRC) community. A snowball sampling technique was deployed following initial contact with a small number of participants and, consequently, the research makes no claims to be representative of the whole immigrant student/international student population within the study area.

In terms of participant characteristics, the vast majority (45) were attending UBC at the time of the interviews.<sup>1</sup> Only 3 were on a study permit (although 3 more had entered Canada as international students only to change their immigration status shortly after); the rest were permanent residents/citizens. Table 4.1 outlines some modal characteristics of the participants and table 4.2 shows place of birth.

**Table 4.1: Modal Characteristics**

Modal year of birth	1982
Modal year of entry into Canada	1996
Modal age at immigration	15 years

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, UBC has one of the most demanding admissions criteria of all Canada's universities (Maclean's 2003), requiring, for example, a 90 percent average or above for first year entry to Commerce.

**Table 4.2: Place of Birth**

Hong Kong	39
Taiwan	7
PRC	2
Singapore ('other')	1

Twenty-seven of the 50 participants claimed to speak 3 or more languages (the most usual combination being, overwhelmingly, Cantonese, Mandarin and English). The vast majority had several family members living outside their country of birth in one or more of the following countries: Canada, Hong Kong, the UK, the US, New Zealand, China, Taiwan, Australia, Japan and Malaysia. Thirty-four stated their intention to leave Canada after their graduation to go to either the UK, the US, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Russia or Taiwan, even though 45 of the 50 had already attained Canadian citizenship.

The social class of participants may be inferred from parental occupations and parental education. Although information was not available for all of these criteria, I can make some general claims. Stated parental occupations included: 'retired' (4), merchant, drug store seller, land developer, senior technician, lawyer, sandwich packer, teacher (2), dentist, professor, accountant (2), businessman (7), manager (2) civil/electrical engineer (5), florist, computer technician, financial advisor and doctor. Some of these stated occupations refer to work taken up after immigration, and so do not necessarily reflect parents' socio-economic status in the country of origin. Significantly, almost half of these



participants had a parent with a university degree, reflecting the middle-class status of my sample; this statistic is also representative of the immigrant population of Canada as a whole as table 4.3 demonstrates:

**Table 4.3: Immigration to Canada by Level of Education 1999 <sup>2</sup>**

0 – 9 years of schooling	15.26%
10 – 12 years of schooling	18.90%
13 or more years of schooling	8.46%
Post-secondary qualification	57.38%

Source: CIC 2001

In order to understand the deployment of the cultural capital acquired through education in Canada, a second set of interviews was undertaken in Hong Kong with young graduate returnees. These participants were recruited primarily through an advertisement placed in the Hong Kong-UBC alumni newsletter. In addition, I was able to draw upon some personal contacts. I administered a questionnaire and conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (lasting on average 1.5 hours) with 23 returnee graduates now living and working in Hong Kong (all declaring their place of birth as Hong Kong). The majority of these were graduates of UBC. I also held a focus group with 5 participants who had graduated within the last 3 years from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. The modal year of birth of participants was 1975/1977 and the majority

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<sup>2</sup> Principal applicants and dependants.

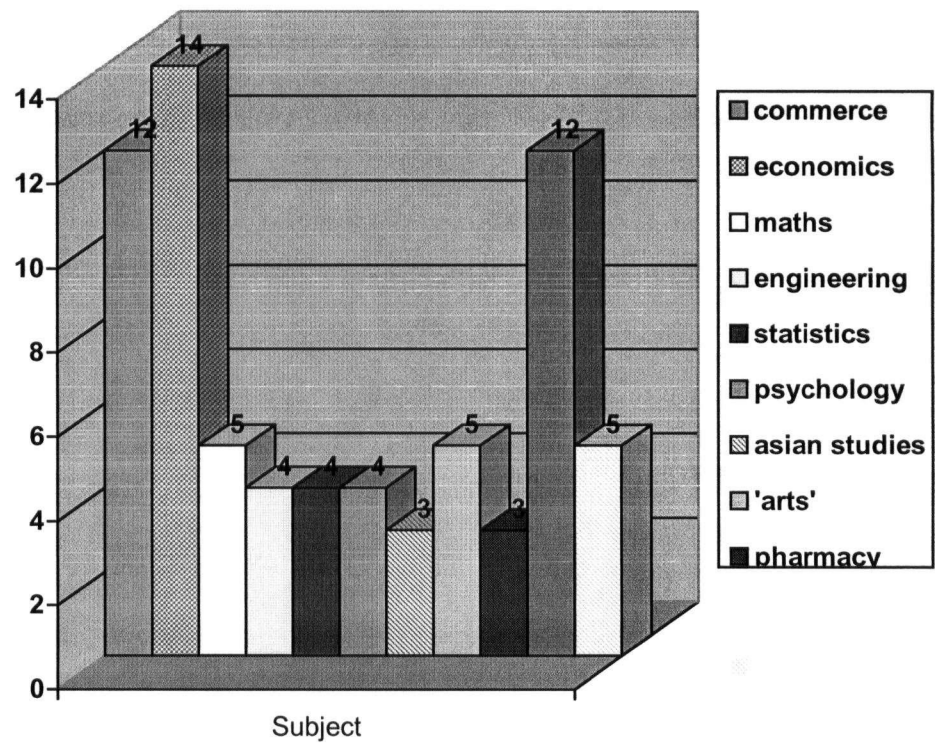
immigrated to Canada between 1989 and 1993. The modal year of their return to Hong Kong was 2000. Like the student participants, extended family members were dispersed around the world, particularly in the US and the UK. In terms of parental occupations, most responded that their parents had retired, although 'business' was the most commonly cited occupational category. In this case, only 1/3 of parents had a post-secondary qualification.

Taken as a whole, the two groups of participants studied a relatively narrow range of subjects at university, as shown in figure 4.1; over 60 percent of those interviewed had majored in economics, commerce, or the sciences.<sup>3</sup>

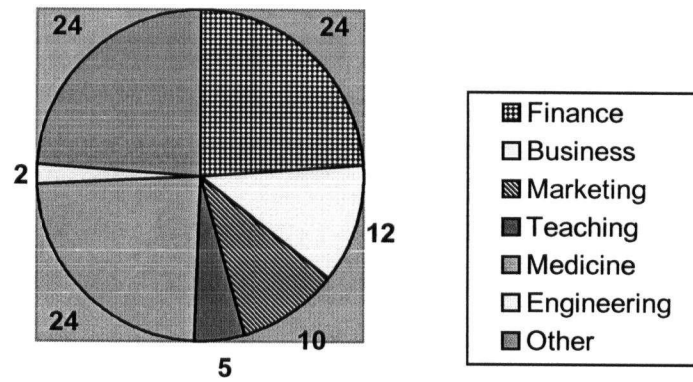
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<sup>3</sup> Intended career in the 'other' category included lawyer, GIS applications, computer programmer, designer and civil servant.

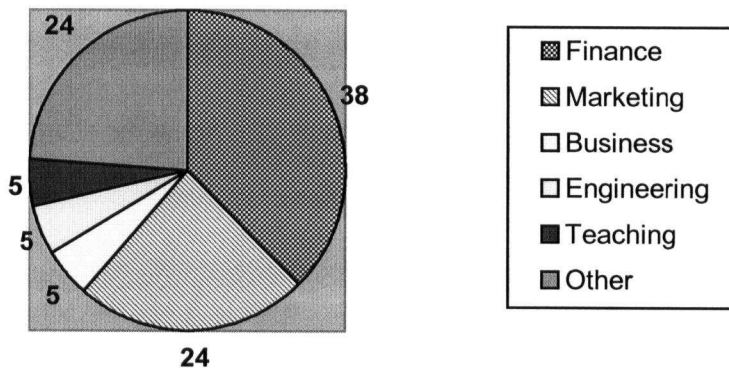
Figure 4.1: Total Participants, Subjects taken at University



**Figure 4.2: Vancouver Participants' Intended Careers**

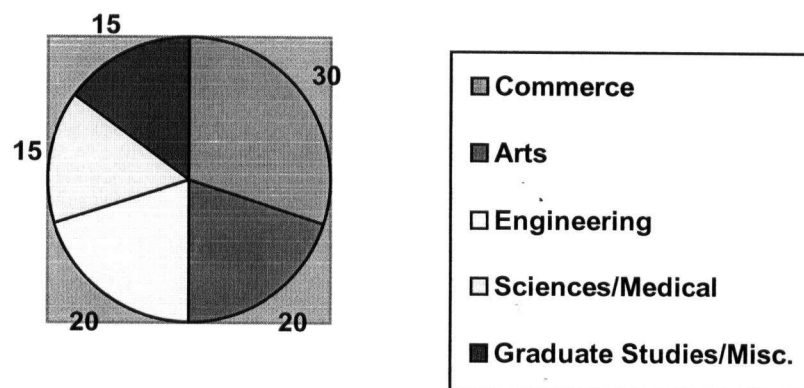


**Figure 4.3: Employment of Hong Kong Participants**



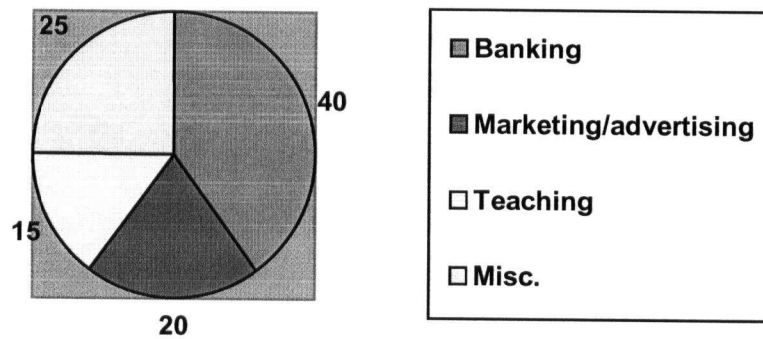
Clearly, the size of my sample demands that caution is exercised in drawing general assumptions based on my research. The broad profile of my sample, however, reflects in important respects the profile of the much larger (although limited) set of data on all current members (c. 1000) of the UBC-Hong Kong Alumni Association.

**Figure 4.4: University Subjects by Total Alumni Membership**



Source: Hong Kong-UBC Alumni Association

**Figure 4.5: Current Jobs by Total Alumni Membership**



Source: Hong Kong-UBC Alumni Association

In chapters 4 – 6, I examine the intersection of the supply of international education with the demand of East Asian households for the credentials it proffers, along with the family strategies, including transnational migration, to secure its acquisition.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND SPATIAL STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE DIASPORA**

‘For many ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, both the well-off and the not-so-rich, strategies of accumulation begin with the acquisition of a Western education...’ (Ong 1999, p. 95)

This chapter begins to develop a conceptual framework through which the symbolic and material implications of the ‘overseas education’ can be explored. In chapter 5, I focus specifically on the conceptualisation of ‘education’. Here, I situate the acquisition of foreign educational credentials historically and geographically within a much broader discussion; ‘overseas education’ is conceived as part of a wider process of capital accumulation within the contemporary Chinese diaspora. In particular, I am concerned with highlighting the relationship between the spatial and social strategies of middle-class East Asian families (as manifest in recent trans-Pacific migration), the accumulation of different forms of capital and the reproduction of class status in a transnational, ‘trans-local’<sup>1</sup> social space.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis explored the intersection of neoliberal ideology and the recent transformation of education at a variety of spatial scales, emphasising the dual tendency towards the standardisation and differentiation of education systems worldwide and the implications for the emergence of a global map of international education. I examined how organisations, governments, and educational institutions have responded

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of trans-localities was developed in a collection of essays edited by Smith and Guarnizo in 1998.

to the imperative to 'internationalise' inherent in globalisation. In Section Two, I theorise how and why these new manifestations of educational provision are *consumed and appropriated by particular social agents in particular places* through a detailed analysis of empirical data.

Existing scholarship on the contemporary Chinese diaspora provides necessary context by demonstrating the relationship between the social, cultural and spatial strategies of migrants, their families and the 'overseas education' within a more encompassing process of *capital accumulation*. My analysis is influenced in no small part by the contribution of anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1999), in the book *Flexible Citizenship*. In her own words, this work:

'places human practices and cultural logics at the center of discussions on globalization. Whereas globalization has been analyzed as consisting of flows of capital, information, and populations, my interest is in the cultural logics that inform and structure border crossings as well as state strategies. My goal is to tease out the rationalities (political, economic, cultural) that shape migration [...] In other words, I seek to bring into the same analytical framework the economic rationalities of globalization and the cultural dynamics that shape human and political responses. As a social scientist, I point to the economic rationality that encourages family emigration or the political rationality that invites foreign capital, but as an anthropologist, I am primarily concerned with the cultural logics that make these actions thinkable, practicable, and desirable, which are embedded in processes of capital accumulation' (p. 5).

In much the same way, I focus upon how the recent mobility of families between East Asia and Canada is 'embedded in processes of capital accumulation,' prioritising both the 'rationalities' that shape migration and the 'cultural logics' that drive them.

The empirical context is found in a much larger trans-Pacific population flow that has characterised the immigration regimes of the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand over the last two to three decades (Castles and Miller 1993), and particularly the



migration of middle-class families from East Asia. Political imperatives incorporating economic strategies have generally dominated explanations; Ron Skeldon's definitive collection of essays in 1994 and 1995 underscored the overwhelming 'fear of China' amongst emigrant families from Hong Kong and a similar motivation has been generally attributed to the substantial migration from Taiwan during the latter part of the 1990s (Tseng 1997). Alongside migrants' desire for a 'foreign passport', the desire for property has been widely noted - the impacts on real estate and the built environment more generally in certain Canadian cities have been significant (Ley et al. 1992, Li 1994, Mitchell 1996, Ley 1995, Smart and Smart 1996, Olds 1998, 2001). In contrast, a relatively small literature has focussed on the 'cultural logics' of this migration (Mitchell 1997a, 1997b, Olds 1998, Ong 1999, Waters 2000, Ley and Kobayashi 2002, Teo 2003, Ley and Waters 2004), which will be the focus of my discussion.

Theoretically, this migration is increasingly conceived in terms of 'transnationalism', commonly defined as the process by which migrants actively maintain a variety of ties (political, social, economic, emotional) to more than one country simultaneously (Basch et al. 1994). Some of the ways in which migrant families have continued to live and work in Asia even as they 'reside' in North America are underscored in recent scholarship on Chinese migration (e.g. Mitchell 1997a, 1997b, Ong and Nonini 1997, Olds 1998, Ong 1999, Olds and Yeung 1999, Zhou and Tseng 2001, Waters 2002, 2003, Teo 2003, Hiebert and Ley 2004). Many of these migrants now possess dual (or even triple) citizenship, caricatured in Ong's (1999) description of the Hong Kong-Chinese 'multiple-passport holder' who claims to feel at home anywhere, as long as it is near an airport. More generally, transnational population mobility has mounted a direct challenge to

traditional conceptions of national citizenship; concern has been raised that 'dual nationality' may be incompatible with the 'affective' demands of citizenship (Bloemraad 2000). Soysal's (1994) theory of 'postnational citizenship', Baubock's (1994) 'transnational citizenship' and Kymlicka's (1995) 'multicultural citizenship' are three examples of the ways in which political theory is being refashioned in response to the proliferation of multiple national allegiances amongst contemporary migrants.

### **Capital, capital accumulation and social reproduction**

An explanation of the meaning of 'capital' must necessarily precede a more in-depth discussion of 'capital accumulation' in the context of the thesis and for this I turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986). In the following definition, he proffers an insight into the relations between 'capital', the structure of society, and the distribution of life-chances:

'The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it, accumulation and all its effects [...] It is what makes the games of society – not least, the economic game – something other than simple games of chance [...] Roulette, which holds out the opportunity of winning a lot of money in a short space of time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously [...] gives a fairly accurate image of this imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without hereditary or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one [...] so that at each moment anyone can become anything. Capital, which in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains the tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types and sub-types of capital at any given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality

of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices' (Bourdieu 1986, pp. 241 – 242).

From this definition, I would like to emphasise several related points that will, as the thesis progresses, illuminate its central concerns. Firstly, Bourdieu suggests that the life chances attributable to different social groups are determined by the distribution of capital in society. Social class is defined, by his terms, in relation to the possession of different forms of capital. It follows, as a second point, that possession of capital determines *opportunities* for *further* accumulation, thereby reproducing the existing social structure and the position of families within this structure.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, accumulation is achieved by way of a variety of different strategies or 'practices'; Bourdieu defines social reproduction as 'the set of outwardly very different practices whereby individuals or families tend, unconsciously and consciously, to maintain or increase their assets and consequently to maintain or improve their position in the class structure' (p. 125). And finally, it should be noted that capital does not only indicate financial wealth and material possessions (although it does include these). According to Bourdieu, it can take three principal forms: economic capital, 'which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights,' cultural capital, 'which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications,' and social capital, 'made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital' (1986, p. 243). Recent scholarship on the contemporary Chinese

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<sup>2</sup> As I show in Chapter 7, the social and cultural capital already possessed by the parents of an immigrant child will play a large part in determining his or her chances of academic success (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, Coleman 1988, Bourdieu 1984, Portes and MacLeod 1996); academic qualifications concentrate capital within the household, reproducing the social class status of the family.

diaspora is replete with implicit reference to the social reproduction strategies of middle-class families as they endeavour to maintain or increase their assets through migration. Each of the aspects of social reproduction outlined above is evident. As Ong (1999) has written: 'Chinese entrepreneurs are not merely engaged in profit making; they are also acquiring a range of symbolic capitals that will facilitate their positioning, economic negotiation, and cultural acceptance in different geographical sites' (pp.18 – 19). My thesis underscores the fundamental geographies of this capital accumulation and exchange, embedded in different sites, as indicated in the incisive spatial strategies of middle-class families from Hong Kong.

### **The economic and cultural context to migration**

The transformation of the Asia-Pacific regional economy has been described as 'a triumph of free-market capitalism' (Hamilton 1999, p. 14); in a remarkably short space of time (just 30 years from the mid-1960s) Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea became the most competitive producers and exporters with the highest rate of GNP growth in the world (Castells 1996, Dicken 2003). The reasons for this rapid economic development have been widely debated, although a consensus has emerged around the importance of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises, which were able to use networking and subcontracting to link up effectively to a global market, demonstrating significant 'flexibility' in the face of fluctuating world demand. Hong Kong's industrial structure, for example, overwhelmingly comprised small businesses – in 1981, over 90 percent of its manufacturing firms had less than fifty employees (Castells 1996). Similarly in Taiwan, development was dependent upon:

‘a large number of small and medium firms, set up with family savings and cooperative savings networks, and supported when necessary with government bank credits...most of Taiwan’s development was enacted by a flexible combination of decentralized networks of family-based Taiwanese firms, acting as subcontractors for foreign manufacturers located in Taiwan, and as suppliers of international commercial networks.’ (Castells 1996, p. 255-256)

Notably, these ‘economic’ processes are given social and cultural explanations, particularly in relation to the importance of *affective ties* (‘guanxi’), and in contrast to a notion of Western-style capitalism. As Peter Dicken (2003) here describes:

‘A *very different kind* of business network is to be found within the Overseas Chinese entrepreneurial system that underpins much of the dynamic economic development not only of Hong Kong and Taiwan but also throughout much of South East Asia. Their essence has been described as ‘weak organizations and strong linkages’. Personal relationships based on reciprocity (guanxi) play a central role *in contrast to the situation in Western firms* where formal contractual arrangements are the norm.’ (p. 232, emphasis added)

I want to highlight the centrality of *the family* in many accounts of East Asian economic transformation (Wong 1985, Tai 1989, Greenhalgh 1994, Mitchell 1995, Chu 1996, Hsing 1997), as part of a wider concern with the role of Confucianist ideology in endorsing ‘values’ particularly conducive to economic success. In the context of contemporary Chinese business strategies, Confucianism is associated with paternalistic relationships (reducing conflict within the family), the promotion of familial (over individualistic) goals, the importance of *education* and intellectual growth,<sup>3</sup> and a diligent work ethic encouraging the accumulation of wealth (Tai 1989). Thus, whilst contemporary middle-class migrants remain ‘loyal adherents to Chinese familism’ (Chu 1996, p. 213), the ‘modern imperative’ towards capital accumulation demands ‘a

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<sup>3</sup> Cohen (1997) notes that “a passion for certification” is a distinctive feature of overseas Chinese (p. 172).

rationalistic, instrumental attitude towards familistic values' (King 1996, p. 270). As Ong and Nonini (1997) have observed:

'the contemporary regime of flexible accumulation has called forth new deployments of "family" [...] from within the accumulation strategies of transnational Chinese. [The family] represents a long-standing habitus whose very flexibilities have now been placed in the service of accumulation strategies under the novel conditions of late capitalism.' (p. 21)

As I will show in later chapters, the acquisition of 'overseas education' must be understood in relation to broader *familial* objectives and not usually, as might be assumed, in terms of individual career advancement.<sup>4</sup>

### **The new middle-class and migration**

Economic development has transformed the social class structure of East Asian societies with significant implications for contemporary patterns of migration:

The gleaming new skyscrapers of Asia's cities, the traffic jams, the busy airports...all these things should remind us that the surging growth has created a large and growing Asian middle class. Economists predicted in mid-decade that by the end of the nineties there would be 400 million Asians with incomes equivalent to the average in today's rich countries; a three-fold increase in the size of Asia's middle class in ten years. It is a huge market for every item of prosperous lifestyles. (Patten 1998, p. 122)

This emergent middle-class of "new rich" capitalists possess, it has been argued, both financial wealth *and* technical expertise (Robison and Goodman 1996, Chu 1996, Hamilton 1999), espousing both traditional familial values *and* principles of free-market

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<sup>4</sup> This point is underscored by the fact that many families choose immigration over the ostensibly 'easier' option of sending a child overseas on a temporary study permit.

capitalism (Ong and Nonini 1997, Ong 1999). They have also displayed a propensity to migrate. Driven 'by the memory of previous Chinese disasters':

'For over a century, overseas Chinese have been the forerunners of today's multiply displaced subjects, who are always on the move both mentally and physically.' (Ong 1999, p. 2; see also Skeldon 1997, Wang 2000)

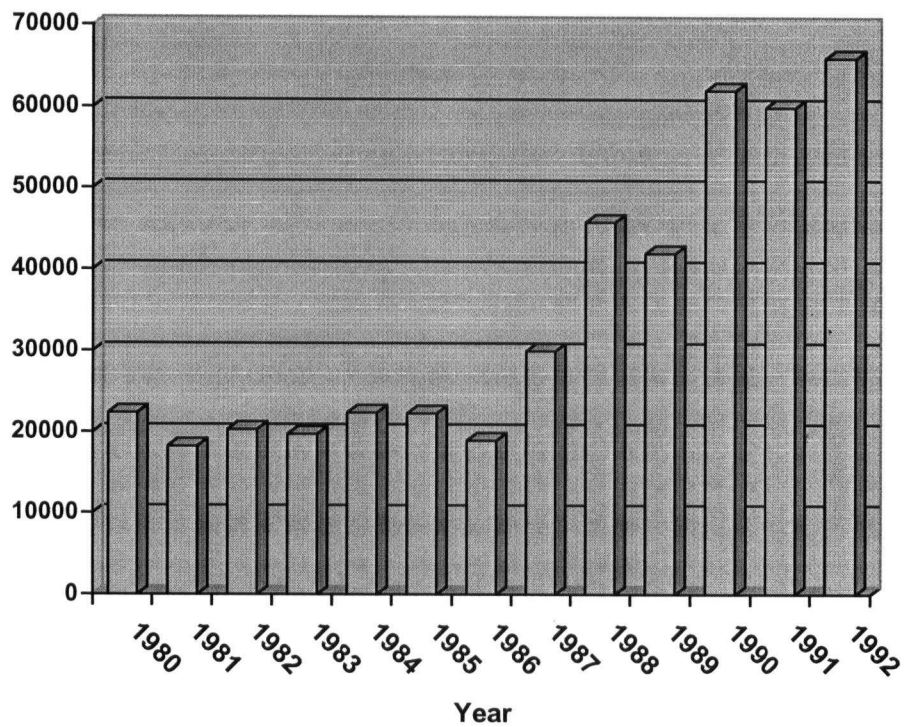
Family histories of upheaval and relocation have created a society where, in the terms suggested by Appadurai (1996), the possibility of migration is more easily imagined.

With the approach of 1997 and the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese rule, many middle-class Chinese became 'reluctant exiles' (Skeldon 1994); migration was perceived as *the* means by which family social status, material possessions, and freedom could be secured. In 1992, around 38, 000 people left Hong Kong for Canada, approximately 15, 000 went to Australia and 15, 000 – 16, 000 went to the US (Skeldon 1994) (figures 4.1 and 4.2).<sup>5</sup> According to Skeldon (1994) these included 'some of the best educated, well trained, and highly skilled of Hong Kong's population' and many had 'considerable wealth' (pp. 31 – 32). Emigrant profiles showed a concentration of people with degree-level education (15 – 19 percent) compared to the population of Hong Kong as a whole (4 percent).

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<sup>5</sup> This is the period most germane to my research as it was in this particular flow that the vast majority of my research participants came to Canada.

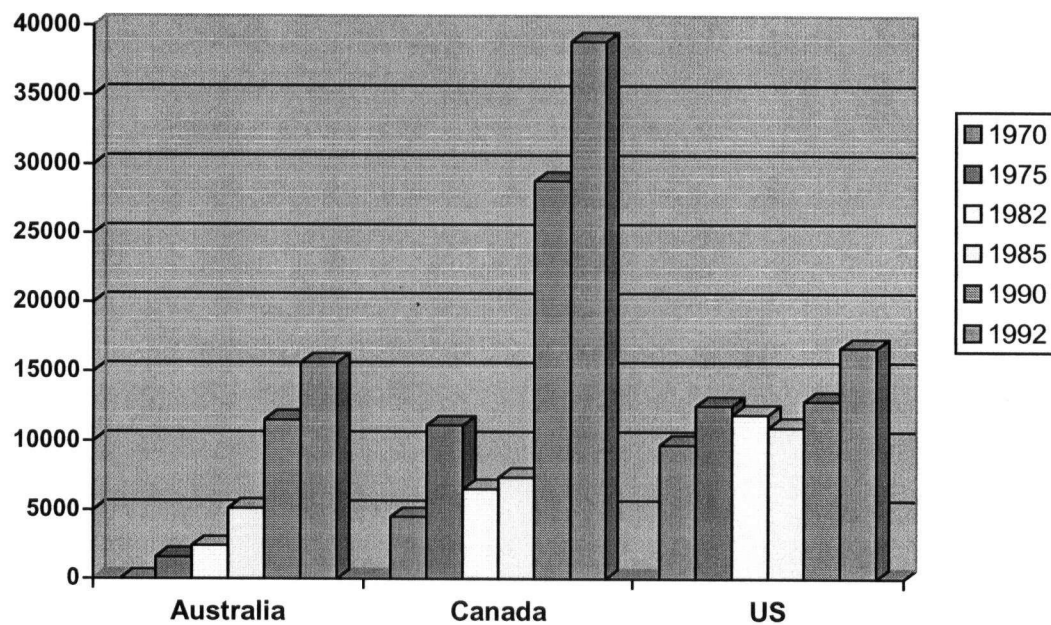
**Figure 4.6: Official Hong Kong Government Estimates of Emigration, 1980 - 1992**



Source: Skeldon 1994



**Figure 4.7: Annual Landings of Immigrants whose Last Place of Previous Residence was Hong Kong**



Source: Skeldon 1994

### **The acquisition and exchange of cultural capital**

Perhaps as a consequence of the impact of this substantial migration upon the various 'host' societies (Ley 1995, Mitchell 1997, Olds 1998, Hiebert 1999), an image of a powerful, transnational, and 'hypermobile' elite was fashioned in both public media and academic arenas (Skeldon 1997, Ong and Nonini 1997). Contemporary Chinese migrants have been conceived to use *spatial* strategies as part of the relentless pursuit of capital (overwhelmingly equated with economic capital), involving the dispersal and control of family members around the world (Mitchell 1995, 1997, Ong and Nonini 1997, Olds 1998, Olds and Yeung 1999, Ong 1999, Waters 2002). I focus here on the pursuit of *cultural capital* and, in Ong's (1999) words, the 'cultural logics' of this migration, wherein:

'Hong Kong emigrants [are considered] in terms of the flexible strategies of accumulation in both economic and cultural senses. Chinese traders in transnational settings have been viewed mainly as skilful "handlers of money," but rarely have they been seen as agents actively shaping their self-identity in a cross-cultural context. In fact, sinologists tend to conflate overseas-Chinese practices with an essentialized notion of Chinese emigrant culture as one characterized by "the versatility and entrepreneurial qualities of their family firms" but otherwise culturally conservative even in highly dynamic transnational environments. What is often missing in accounts of diasporan experiences is a focus on Chinese diasporan subjects as *active manipulators of cultural symbols*.' (Ong 1999, p. 88, emphasis added)

One example of this approach in the Vancouver context is found in the work of Olds (1998, 2001) through his examination of the CA\$3 billion dollar real estate project, Pacific Place, dating from the late 1980s. The project was developed by Victor Li, the son of Hong Kong's richest property tycoon, Li Ka-shing. Olds (1998) writes:

‘In a standard economic sense, Pacific Place is the product of investment capital from a corporate group in Hong Kong [...] Many urban (and especially property) analysts would conceive of this development process as being reflective of a search by the Li Group (i.e. multinational capitalists) for profit (capital accumulation), in response to perceived opportunity (a rent gap) in conjunction with sufficient demand (from consumers) [...] However, it is important to be aware that property yields are significantly higher in Asian cities such as Hong Kong, Beijing, or Shanghai [...] Given this relative state of affairs, why invest in Vancouver, where returns are limited and the development time scale is extended?’ (p. 377)

Through his analysis, Olds provides what is in effect a story of Chinese transnational family mobility and social reproduction through the accumulation of different forms of capital in different locations (albeit on a grander scale than the stories uncovered in my research). In 1981, Victor Li left Hong Kong to attend Stanford University in the US. Writes Olds (1998): ‘An overseas education at a respected institution is an increasingly common affair in Hong Kong [...] the education of children is a critically important factor in most ethnic Chinese cultures, and it reflects the fundamental role of the family in society’ (p. 371). At twenty-one years old he became a Canadian citizen having ‘set up base’ in Vancouver: ‘This move to Canada would have been sanctioned by his father, and it could be seen as a chance for Victor, as one of the Li “boys”, to “prove himself” by gaining maturity and new experiences.’ (p. 371). Victor’s placement in Vancouver perceptibly epitomises the accumulation of cultural capital with the ultimate goal lying in the social reproduction of status and achievement *within* the family:

‘Quite simply, the Pacific Place project primarily represented a timely opportunity to further a variety of familial and corporate goals related to succession plans within the Hong Kong-based Li group. Pacific Place was effectively used as an educational tool to enhance the skills, reputation, and confidence of Li Ka-shing’s eldest son in the large-scale property development industry. The acquisition of such a large and high-profile site in Vancouver enabled Victor Li to be “groomed” in a strategic non-Hong

Kong locale for his eventual (1993) appointment as a Cheung Kong (Holdings) Ltd. executive' (p. 377).

It is this type of (trans-local) capital that provides the focus for my own empirical inquiry.

The accumulation of cultural capital involves the acquisition of a variety of *embodied cultural traits*, perceived as valuable in the context of particular markets (Bourdieu 1984, 1986).<sup>6</sup> There are evident parallels, here, with the concept of 'cosmopolitanism' (Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1996, Hamilton 1999); indeed, 'cosmopolitan' has been used on a number of occasions to characterise the outlook and practices of contemporary Chinese migrants, particularly those from Hong Kong (Ong and Nonini 1997, Hamilton 1999, Ong 1999, Waters 2000). Cosmopolitanism has been most usually defined in terms of a "cultural competence" (Hannerz 1996) achieved by way of the active consumption and appropriation of 'different' cultures through regular long-distance mobility (Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Calhoun (2002) describes cosmopolitanism as 'the class consciousness of frequent travellers' (p. 86). The spaces inhabited by the cosmopolitan are often exclusive and exclusionary, 'bounded and elitist' and 'marked by a specialized and – paradoxically – rather homogenous transnational culture, a limited interest in engaging 'the Other', and a rather restricted corridor of physical movement between defined spaces in global cities' (Vertovec and Cohen 2002, p. 7; cf. Hiebert 2002). Bourdieu (1984) seeks to dispel the myth that cultural consumption and appropriation is somehow both

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<sup>6</sup> On this point Bourdieu has written: 'Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state [...] implies a labour of inculcation and assimilation. [It] costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor [...] so that all effects of delegation are ruled out' (1986, p. 244).

‘disinterested’ and detached from the economic sphere, explicitly linking these to strategies of capital accumulation and social class reproduction.

In this thesis, the development of a cosmopolitan “cultural competence” amongst Hong Kong immigrant students does not reflect the *random* accumulation of ‘cultural difference’, but rather *a strategic and calculated awareness of the profitable geographies of ‘difference’ in relation to the situated and embedded geographies of market demand*. Through my research I have discovered that, as Bourdieu has convincingly argued, ‘the acquisition of cultural competence is inseparable from insensible acquisition of a ‘sense’ for sound cultural investment’ (1986, p. 85). Hong Kong Chinese families are extremely *knowledgeable* about the types (and locations) of capital they covet. As Ong (1999) has written, these families seek:

‘the kinds of symbolic capital that have *international recognition and value*, not only in the country of origin but also in the country of destination and especially in the transnational spaces where the itineraries of travelling businessmen and professionals intersect’...

Thus while the “global cultural economy” of people, products, and ideas may be characterized by disjunctures, regimes of consumption and credentialisation are definitely hierarchized, with Europe and America setting the standards of international middle-class style.’ (Ong 1999, p. 90)

Examples in the existing literature, however, have tended to overlook the importance of a specific, *geographically embedded market* for these cultural competences. Ong (1999), for example, assumes that the cultural capital sought by Hong Kong Chinese business families represents the desire for acceptance in the ‘host’ society, stressing the difficulties faced by Chinese migrants in converting cultural capital into economic success under these circumstances. In contrast, I argue that (for my participants at least)

the accumulation of the overseas degree is *generally* related to the intention to *return to Asia* where the conversion rate is perceived to be greatest as a result of the relative *scarcity* of these 'Western' cultural traits. Return to Hong Kong was planned in advance of graduation and not, as Ong and others might suggest, following failure to find adequate employment in Canada. Related to this point, Hong Kong transnational subjects often seek to maintain an element of 'Chineseness' within their repertoire of cultural competences and signs, positioning them perfectly for a business or professional career in Asia. Mitchell (1997a) has described the active manipulation of cultural appearance as 'self-fashioning'. She writes:

'As capitalist networks articulate, Chinese businessmen who speak the language of the global economic subject but are also imbricated in a Hong Kong Chinese discourse are able to operate as quintessential middlemen. With flexible citizenship and deterritorialized systems of credit, but with a durable and elastic business network established on the basis of the extended family, overseas Hong Kong capitalists can manipulate images of both the transnational cosmopolitan and the "ethnic Chinese," enabling them to position themselves at the lucrative center of Pacific Rim business.' (1997a, p. 236)

I have found examples of such strategic and very self-conscious 'self-fashioning', involving the cultivation of a mix of 'Chinese' and 'Western' traits, among Hong Kong immigrant students in Vancouver (see chapter 8).

### **Spatial strategies: astronaut families and satellite kids**

I want to exemplify the processes described above with a brief description of the 'astronaut family' and 'satellite kids', epitomising the use of spatial strategies with the objective of maximising the accumulation of different capitals within the immigrant household. In earlier research I examined the nature of these transnational social forms

amongst immigrant families from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the context of Vancouver (Waters 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, Ley and Waters 2004). During the early 1990s, the Chinese-language media began to observe that many immigrant males (the 'astronauts') had returned to Asia to work, leaving their wives and children behind in Canada. In a smaller (although far more worrying) number of cases, both parents had returned to Asia and children had been left in Vancouver alone (as 'satellite kids'). In both situations, the family was separated by the Pacific Ocean for most of the year, very often with significant social and emotional consequences for the women and children (Man 1993, 1995, Waters 2002).

The reasons underlying this transnational strategy are crucial to the interpretation of its meaning. Skeldon (1995) has described the astronaut family as a "syndrome", reflecting widespread observations that economic-class immigrants to Canada, as well as to Australia and the US, had faced significant barriers to employment (Smart 1994, Lam 1994, Ley 1999, 2003). This argument asserts that failure to find work compelled the husband to return to the country of origin; the astronaut situation was entered into reluctantly and as a last resort, challenging a prevalent 'myth' of an 'immigrant overclass' (Ley 1999). In spite of these powerful arguments, however, in my research I found that employment failure accounted for the astronaut family in a very small minority of cases. For the vast majority of the families interviewed (25 out of 28) the transnational family arrangement had been *planned* well in advance of emigration.

The objectives of this strategy are inseparable from the objective of capital accumulation and the social reproduction of the family unit; opportunities for economic accumulation remained located in East Asia, whilst various opportunities for the

accumulation of cultural capital were maximised in Vancouver. The children's 'education' was found to be one of the most important reasons for initial immigration to Canada and *the* reason why the 'satellite kids' remained in Vancouver when their parents returned to Hong Kong or Taiwan.

### **Implications for social reproduction in the Chinese diaspora**

This chapter has sought to illustrate, with examples from recent scholarship, one important aspect of the wider theoretical and empirical context of my research. Outlining a theory of capital accumulation, I have suggested how this might be salient to explaining the recent trans-Pacific migration of middle-class families. In much of the recent scholarship on Chinese migration, social reproduction strategies have remained implicit however, subsumed beneath a less theoretically rigorous discussion of 'political' and/or 'economic' imperatives. These, I have argued, are inseparable from strategies of cultural accumulation and are inseparable also from the wider objective of social class reproduction within the family unit. What this scholarship fails to indicate, and what I seek to underline in my own research, are the important geographies of capital accumulation *and* exchange. The nature of trans-Pacific, circular mobility between Hong Kong and Vancouver is better understood in light of these geographies. In the chapter that follows I will discuss the specific meaning of 'education' within this broad transnational field of varied capitals and their accumulation.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCEPTUALISING EDUCATION

‘Credentials help define the contemporary social order, in the medieval sense of *ordo*, a set of graduations at once temporal and spiritual, mundane and celestial, which establish incommensurable degrees of worth among men and women, not only by sorting and allocating them across the different slots that make up the social structure, but also, and more importantly, by presenting the resulting inequalities between them as ineluctable necessities born out of talent, effort, and the desire of individuals.’ (Wacquant 1996: x)

This chapter provides a brief discussion of education as it is conceived in the context of this research.<sup>1</sup> The thesis takes a particular view on education, emerging from the scholastic history of the sociology of education, and established in the writings, in particular, of Pierre Bourdieu. It does not consider the content of education *per se*,<sup>2</sup> or its pedagogic aspects. Rather, it focuses primarily on the symbolic meanings and practical, material consequences of acquiring foreign educational credentials, with particular reference to the migration strategies of middle-class families from Hong Kong. In this thesis, credentials (arising from time spent in formal education) are not assumed to reflect only the natural talent and ability of persons, engaged in the competitive struggles of a ‘meritocratic’ society (Goldthorpe 1996, cf. Young 1958). Rather, I concur with the view that academic qualifications can also be *strategically accumulated* through the purposeful actions of shrewd social subjects with access to particular (financial, cultural and social) resources, that the practices of, and success in, accumulation are largely determined by ‘social class’ (Bourdieu 1984, 1996, Brown 1995, Ball 2003), and that accumulation

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<sup>1</sup> All the ideas expressed here will be substantially developed in the ensuing empirical sections.

<sup>2</sup> Although it does, as will be seen, consider some of the skills associated with learning within different educational systems.

strategies are inextricably linked to an elemental concern with social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, Bourdieu 1984, 1986, Mitchell et al. 2004).

The global expansion of educational provision described in Section One has promised to undermine older patterns of social stratification: a societal shift, in Collins's words, 'from ascription to achievement, from a system of privilege to a technical meritocracy' (1979, p. 5). Worldwide, more people have access to higher levels of education than ever before (UNESCO 2003a). And yet, it is not apparent that social mobility has thereby followed. Examining the consequences of educational expansion, several researchers have observed the perpetuation of existing social divisions, and even the intensification of inequalities (Bondi and Matthews 1988, Brown 1995, Goldthorpe 1996). Collins (1979) has argued, in the context of the United States, that the academic attainment of children has maintained the same degree of correlation with the father's occupation throughout the last fifty years. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) make a similar point for France:

'Between 1961 – 62 and 1965 – 66, a period of growth in higher education, often interpreted as a democratisation of admissions, the structure of the distribution of educational opportunities relative to social class did indeed shift upwards, but it remained virtually unchanged in shape. In other words, the increased enrolment of 18 – 20 year olds was distributed among the different social classes in proportions roughly equal to those defining the previous distribution of opportunities.' (pp. 91 - 93)

As these discussions indicate, the relationship between education systems, occupational structures and social class has remained a central focus of recent scholarship (Bourdieu 1984, 1996, Ehrenreich 1989, Brown 1995, Goldthorpe 1996, Brown et al. 1997, Gibson and Asthana 1998, 2000, Ball 2003). The impact of educational and occupational changes

on the *middle-classes* has been of particular interest to many authors on the subject, including Philip Brown (1995). He writes:

‘the changing relationship between education and occupational stratification should be understood in terms of group conflict over scarce resources (credentials, income, occupational status). This is because the middle classes have been increasingly dependent upon access to professional occupations as a means of reproducing social status and privileged life-styles between the generations, and given a bureaucratisation of the recruitment process where access to virtually all occupational careers has come to depend upon the acquisition of credentials through formal examination.’ (p. 31)

Middle-class dependency on academic credentials and increasing insecurity consequent upon the democratisation of educational access have spawned, it is claimed, a variety of ‘strategies’ designed to maintain their class privilege and status (Ehrenreich 1989, Ball 2003). Here I identify three broad issues that, on reviewing the literature, seem particularly pertinent to understanding the contemporary nature of middle-class social reproduction in Hong Kong. A first, prominent theme describes a process of differentiation in the market for education. In Section One, I discussed the contemporary progression of neoliberal political ideology and the application of market principles to public education systems, resulting in a widespread rhetoric of ‘competition’ and ‘choice.’ Whilst access to education may be widening, the quality and type of education is becoming increasingly differentiated, and dependent upon the various assets of its ‘consumers’. As described here by Brown (1995):

‘Whereas in the post-war period the rules of engagement were based upon the ideology of meritocracy and the introduction of ‘comprehensive’ education, they are now based on ‘market’ principles and what has been called the ‘ideology of parentocracy’ (Brown 1990). As a consequence, educational selection is increasingly based on the wealth and wishes of parents rather than the individual abilities and efforts of pupils.’ (pp. 43 - 44)

International education is, I argue, an extreme example of the application of market principles to education, and is highly dependent upon the 'wealth and wishes of parents'.

A second important issue refers to the process of 'credential inflation', arising as a consequence of widening access to education. Whilst more people have attained university-level qualifications so the best jobs have required progressively higher credentials (Brown 1995, Brown et al. 1997). As Bourdieu has convincingly argued, only certain social groups possess the resources necessary to prolong schooling in 'time free from economic necessity' (1986, p. 246).

And thirdly and finally, there is a tendency towards educational and occupational *specialisation* in post-industrial societies. As I will go on to discuss, the popularity of more specialised qualifications, along side the prolonging of education, is perceived to maintain existing patterns of privilege by 'giving the middle classes the opportunity to capitalise on their superior market power in the competition for credentials within a market-driven system of education' (Brown 1995, p. 46). Furthermore, as Brown (1995) notes and I will proceed to demonstrate in some detail, families are able to translate this educational specialisation into occupational specialisation, creating exclusive 'enclaves' of middle-class jobs.

My argument, then, is concerned with identifying and explicating class-based, educational strategies in the context of wider societal transformations. It examines the ways in which middle-class families in East Asia have responded to a dependency on academic credentials, the democratisation of access to education and consequent credential inflation, and 'upped the ante' by choosing an *overseas* education for their children. Middle-class families, it will be argued, acquire a Western education as part of a

more general process of capital accumulation and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1984). The children pursue a very narrow range of academic ‘specialisms’ at university in Canada and, subsequently, enter similar occupations (even, in some cases, the same firms as each other) back in Hong Kong. The social processes underlying these patterns will be examined in detail in chapters 7, 8 and 9. I now turn, however, to discuss some of the more conceptual issues underlying these claims. I begin by highlighting the importance of *different forms of capital*, and demonstrate their central relevance to this argument.

### **The forms of capital**

In the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, *capital*, in its various forms, is integral to society and to stratification within society. He writes:

‘the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at any given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices.’ (1986, 242)<sup>3</sup>

Access to forms of capital, he suggests, determines the life chances of social groups, whilst the consequent distribution of life chances tends to be fixed and self-perpetuating. Capital has the propensity ‘to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form [...] to persist in its being [...] a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible’ (1986, pp.241-242). We need only think of scholarship describing the ‘cycle of poverty’, ‘neighbourhood effects’, and the ‘underclass thesis’ (e.g. Wilson 1987, 1991), wherein the links between physical

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<sup>3</sup> In this description, there is an implicit allusion to the geography of capital, through reference to its varied distribution.

immobility, access to resources, and the intergenerational perpetuation of deprivation are stressed, to understand some of the ways in which this may be true. In *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), William Julius Wilson describes the deficit of economic and social capital associated with the spatial concentration of urban poverty in the United States, arguing that 'the central predicament of inner-city ghetto residents is joblessness reinforced by a growing social isolation in impoverished neighbourhoods' (1991, p. 9). A much smaller body of scholarship on the 'geography of education' has demonstrated the ways in which 'schooling serves to reinforce existing patterns of social advantage' (Gibson and Asthana 1998, p.195). In this thesis, I will argue that the geographical and social distribution of educational opportunities (at various spatial scales) is akin to the distribution of various capitals. Access to education both determines, and is determined by, the particular social group to which my research participants belong.

Bourdieu's take on capital clearly diverges from what may be described as the classical view. He conceives of economic exchanges as only a 'particular case of exchange' (p. 242), serving to mask other (social and cultural) forms of accumulation as 'disinterested.' When capital is confined to a description of economic exchange only, social and cultural activities are perceived as somehow purified, untainted by a profit motive or strategic concerns. The differential power relations underlying the appropriation of various forms of capital are also thereby obscured. An alternative, according to Bourdieu, is to perceive capital in its 'three fundamental guises' (p. 243), as described in chapter 4. Crucially, as noted here by Brown (1995), 'cultural capital has long been recognised as vital to the reproduction of the middle classes. In Marshall's (1920) classic work on the *Principles of Economics* he recognised that 'The professional classes especially, while generally eager to save some capital for their children, are even

more alert for opportunities of investing in them' (562)' (p.33). This thesis examines the ways in which middle-class households from Hong Kong secure the future social and economic status of their families through strategic investment in the cultural capital of their children.<sup>4</sup>

### **Institutionalised and embodied cultural capital**

Bourdieu argues that cultural capital exists in three states: the 'institutionalised' state, the 'embodied' state, and the 'objectified' state. I am principally concerned with the first and second of these forms. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital in the institutionalised state is represented in the qualification or credential:

'By conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them (by substituting one for another in succession). Furthermore, it makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital. This product of the conversion of economic capital into cultural capital establishes the value, in terms of cultural capital, of the holder of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders and, by the same token, the monetary value for which it can be exchanged on the labor market.' (1986, p. 248)

The implication of this statement is that the academic qualification may translate relatively directly into economic capital in the market place (although not, I will argue, in the manner that human capital theory might suggest). It is worth stressing, however, that holders must possess the *correct* institutionalised cultural capital for successful conversion. Not all qualifications are treated equally when it comes to finding employment and gaining promotions.

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<sup>4</sup> See Bauder 2004 for the application of Bourdieu's forms of capital to immigrant labour-market experiences in Canada.

As I argued in Section One, the proliferation of formally sanctioned academic qualifications and associated regulating bodies (the 'benchmarking imperative' and the implementation of 'best practice') has been a central feature of the expansion of higher education and its international component (see Sklair 2001 for a discussion of benchmarking in relation to globalisation). As the number of colleges, institutes, language schools and new universities has expanded, so they each become increasingly dependent on 'recognised' and 'established' bodies to validate their academic claims. In the drive for institutional recognition, however, the social construction of the institution and the *differential symbolic power* of the qualifications they proffer (to mark social difference) have been hidden. Bourdieu emphasises the fiction of the educational credential:

'With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given moment in time. It institutes cultural capital by collective magic [...] One has only to think of the *concours* which, out of the continuum of infinitesimal differences between performances, produces sharp, absolute, lasting differences, such as that which separates the last successful candidate from the first unsuccessful one, and institutes an essential difference between the officially recognized, guaranteed competence and simple cultural capital, which is constantly required to prove itself. In this case, one sees clearly the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition.' (1986, p. 248)

This thesis addresses the symbolic, performative power of overseas education, conceived as institutionalised cultural capital. It suggests the power of the overseas degree to provide a monetary guarantee, specifically, its power to impose recognition through, as Bourdieu terms it, 'collective magic' in the local labour market in Hong Kong. I seek to



establish more concrete social and geographical processes by which the overseas education gains its power and 'magic'.

As a form of cultural capital, education is more than just an institutionalised credential, however. As discussed in chapter 4, cultural capital also 'presupposes embodiment' (p. 244), involving a process of incorporation that, 'insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor' (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244).<sup>5</sup> Education and credentials are, therefore, also assumed to reflect *embodied* competences. I discussed earlier the ways in which recent scholarship on the spatial strategies of middle- and upper-class Chinese families has made reference to the deliberate and self-conscious fostering of cultural competences; Ong (1999) has argued that the 'would-be immigrant often acquires an intensified sense of him- or herself as body capital that can be constantly improved to meet new and shifting criteria of symbolic power' (p. 91). In a more specific, illuminating example, Ong here discusses the meaning of 'body capital' through a description of a party, attended in a wealthy neighbourhood of San Francisco:

'Though everyone there was fluent in English, practically all spoke Cantonese, and we could have been at an exclusive gathering in Hong Kong. I spoke to one of the younger people at the party. Like many teenage émigrés, she was actively taking lessons – piano, tennis, singing, and dancing – to be able to participate in the social activities of upper-class life [...] she and her Chinese American classmates [...] were intent on learning how to dress, walk, and generally comport themselves in ways that would make themselves "more acceptable to the Americans." Chinese parents frequently encourage their children to display social poise and public confidence by urging them to perform before guests after dinner. Indeed, the young woman I spoke with was very well groomed and was determinedly presenting herself to each guest, as if to practice her lessons in social mixing among this cosmopolitan crowd. Propitious location, the trappings of wealth, and appropriate body language are the

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<sup>5</sup> In chapter 9, I will discuss recent work in economic geography and economic sociology that gives far greater credence to the social and cultural factors impacting economic exchange, especially the importance of 'embodied performances' (Thrift 2000).

cultural forms immigrants must gain mastery over if they are to convert mere economic power into social prestige...' (pp. 87 - 88) <sup>6</sup>

Katharyne Mitchell's conception of 'culture', like Ong's, is somewhat different from many of the earlier critiques emanating from cultural studies that emerged as a challenge to essentialist conceptions of identity and identity formation, and celebrated the politically subversive potential of notions such as 'hybridity' and 'diaspora'. Mitchell argues that cultural identity, defined through these very concepts, can also be highly strategic – reinforcing, rather than undermining, existing patterns of power and privilege. In reference to the use of 'hybridity' and 'diaspora' within cultural studies she writes: 'these concepts have become increasingly disarticulated from history and political economy [...] Various kinds of diasporic, deterritorialized, and hybrid subject positions [...] can and have been used strategically for economic gain' (1997a, p. 533). The notion that 'culture' can be accumulated and manipulated in this way, particularly reflecting middle-class interests (Brown 1995), is precisely what Bourdieu intended with the concept of cultural capital. In addition to the academic credential, therefore, this thesis is also concerned with the relationship between migration, the strategic accumulation of *embodied* cultural capital, and the social class reproduction of Chinese families.

There is, however, another conception of capital that addresses directly the links between educational qualifications and economic capital. I turn now to consider recent debates with implications for the concept of *human capital*, particularly with regards to immigration and accreditation.

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<sup>6</sup> In chapter 6 the issue of identity and migration will be discussed in far greater detail. Identity and the strategic accumulation of embodied cultural capital are examined in relation to concepts of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and diaspora, demonstrating the argument that middle-class Chinese families may actively create a cultural identity for strategic (economic) ends (Ong and Nonini 1997, Hamilton 1999, Ong 1999).

### **Human capital, immigration and accreditation**

Whilst there has been virtually no discussion of immigration *for* education, the issue of immigrant credentials is one of considerable debate and concern (e.g. Smart 1994, Boyer 1996, Pendakur and Pendakur 1996, 1997, Borjas 1999, Chiswick and Miller 2000, Geddie 2002, Bauder 2003). Invariably, these discussions are framed in terms of 'human capital' (Becker 1964), in recognition of the importance of skills, embodied in labour, to regional or national development, and the possibility of calculating economic returns on immigrant education using a form of cost-benefit analysis. Immigration policy has been heavily influenced by human capital theory, reflected in the increasingly widespread use of a 'points system' (for example, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and most recently the UK) to screen immigrant applications. The 'points system' is underpinned by the assumption that the better qualified the immigrant the more economically productive they will be in the 'host' society.

Human capital theory has been criticised with explicit reference to its application in immigration policy (Hanson and Pratt 1995, Boyer 1996, Iredale 2003).<sup>7</sup> Ley (2003) has shown the inadequacies of this perspective in relation to Canada's business immigration programme. In Canada, the issue has been raised frequently in media debate, highlighted recently in the case of a British immigrant couple, originally from Sri Lanka, who are suing the federal government for misleading them that their qualifications and skills would be valued on the job market (Jimenez 2003). A trained accountant and his wife 'have spent five years in Edmonton shovelling snow, cleaning toilets and borrowing

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<sup>7</sup> For a summary of more general criticisms of human capital theory see Woodhall 1987, in Halsey et. al 1997.

money to support their teenaged son' (p. F9). The report cites a recent Statistics Canada study of 164, 200 immigrants who arrived in 2000 and 2001, and found that 60 percent were forced to take jobs other than what they were trained to do. The problem lies with the ability of regulating bodies and organisations to assess and evaluate the foreign credentials of immigrants. Another article in *The Globe and Mail* (2003a, see also 2003b) had the following to say on the issue of accreditation and immigration in Canada:

'The shortage of skilled professionals in Canada has been exceptionally well documented. In the health-care disciplines especially, the need is dire [...] Given this, you might assume that there simply aren't enough doctors, nurses, therapists, orderlies and technicians to meet the demand. But you'd be wrong. There are thousands of surplus health-care professionals among us, many holding advanced degrees from prestigious universities. They are driving cabs, waiting tables, working on factory assembly lines.

The trouble is that the diplomas on their walls are foreign. In Canada, in any number of professional disciplines, foreign credentials are treated with suspicion or outright hostility. Dozens of self-governing professional licensing bodies – the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, for example, or the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario – set their own ground rules for entry. For immigrant professionals, the accreditation process can take years, span numerous exams and cost thousands of dollars.' (p. A12)

The inability of human capital theory to predict the relationship between credentials and economic capital emerge starkly from these discussions. Most significantly for my argument, they highlight the fact that credentials do not travel unproblematically. Human capital theory, in its claims to universalism, fails to address the differentiated geography of credentials and credential recognition, which manifests at multiple scales. A central issue to emerge from my research concerns the extent to which credentials (i.e. the 'overseas degree') are both socially situated and geographically variable. And, whilst human capital may, to a certain extent, describe the relationship between amount of education and type of job, it does not account for the differential chances of different

social groups to access education and thus particular jobs. This is the argument of Pierre Bourdieu, to which I now turn.

### **Cultural capital, class and ‘choice’**

In Bourdieu’s alternative theorisation of credentials as ‘cultural capital’, he offers his own critique of human capital accounts:

‘their [human capital theory] measurement of the yield from scholastic investment takes account only of *monetary* investments and profits, or those directly convertible into money, such as the costs of schooling and the cash equivalent of time devoted to study; they are unable to explain the different proportions of their resources which different agents or different social classes allocate to economic investment and cultural investment because they fail to take systematic account of the structure of the differential chances of profit which various markets offer these agents or classes as a function of the volume and the composition of their assets. Furthermore, because they neglect to relate scholastic investment strategies to the whole set of educational strategies and to the system of reproduction strategies, they inevitabl[y] [...] let slip the best hidden and most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1986, pp. 243 - 244).

This ‘typically functionalist definition’ of education...

‘ignores the contribution which the educational system makes to the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital [...] a definition of human capital, despite its humanistic connotations, does not move beyond economism and ignores, *inter alia*, the fact that the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family. Moreover, the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on the social capital, again inherited, which can be used to back it up (ibid).’

Here, Bourdieu highlights several important issues related to the acquisition of education, which bear directly upon my attempts to conceptualise the ‘overseas degree’.

The first concerns the relationship between education and social class.<sup>8</sup> He observes that different social groups will allocate different resources to education and that this allocation is directly related to the chances of profit perceived to accrue from this investment, and to the assets already existing within the group (see Ball et al. 1995, Ball 2003). Both ‘chances of profit’ and ‘already existing capital’ vary by class status.

The *capacity* to continue in education above and beyond what is absolutely necessary (and legally required) depends upon the possession of various resources that are also frequently linked to class. Most obviously, these refer to the material and monetary resources enabling education to continue in ‘time free from economic necessity’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 246). The global expansion of international education relies upon an increasing number of people with substantial financial backing (this has to be proved in order for a student visa to be issued)<sup>9</sup>. Immigration for education requires, in most instances, considerable economic resources. Every one of my participants has required the financial support of their parents in order to remain in higher education, and all have thereby escaped other social and economic obligations attached to family life to pursue this end. Education is fundamentally a family pursuit.

It is also, therefore, intertwined with a whole set of social reproduction strategies, wherein the *domestic* transmission of capital is especially important. Here we see the

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<sup>8</sup> In these analyses, social class is frequently determined by parental occupations. Bourdieu (1984), for example, uses two measurements of social class in his survey of French families in *Distinction* – ‘educational capital’ (qualifications) and ‘social origin’ (measured by father’s occupation). The occupations of the working class included ‘craftsmen’, ‘small shopkeepers’, technicians, and primary teachers whilst the middle class included industrial and commercial employers, executives, engineers, professionals, secondary and higher education teachers, and ‘artistic producers’. In my own research, social class is established through parental occupations and wealth, indicated by immigration status (frequently ‘economic’) and funding for education (i.e. expensive school fees were in almost every case paid for by the parents).

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Provincial representative, November 2003.

central importance of the *family unit* in educational strategies and social reproduction. In

‘The Forms of Capital’ (1986) Bourdieu has written:

‘Differences in cultural capital possessed by the family imply differences first in the age at which the work of transmission and accumulation begins [...] and then in the capacity [...] to satisfy the specifically cultural demands of a prolonged process of acquisition. Furthermore, and in correlation with this, the length of time for which his family can provide him with the free time, i.e. time free from economic necessity’ (p. 246).

He observes that prolonging the process of education to obtain maximum profit requires the satisfaction of specific ‘cultural demands’. My research has underlined the fact that the families of immigrant students allocate significant resources (of various kinds) to their children’s education, and have done so consistently throughout their lives. They invest heavily, utilising social and cultural capital already present within the family structure (Coleman 1988).<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu’s notion of *class habitus*, I suggest, engages and connects all of these points. It captures both the objective material circumstances of families and the subjective perceptions necessary to pursue education to a stage beyond the ‘norm’.

According to Bourdieu (1984), the habitus ‘organizes practices and the perception of practices, but [is] also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world...’ (p. 170). The social world is thus divided into different types of ‘class habitus’; generalisations about groups can be made based on their objectively structured habitus:

‘Just as the acquired disposition we call ‘handwriting’, that is, a particular forming of letters, always produces the same ‘writing’ – that is, graphic lines that, despite

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu’s definition of cultural capital in the family is similar in many ways to Coleman’s (1988) definition of social capital (see also Portes and MacLeod 1996). Much more will be said about social capital in relation to cultural capital in later chapters.

differences in size, matter, and color related to writing surface (sheet of paper or blackboard) and implement (pencil, pen, or chalk), that is, despite differences of vehicles for the action, have an immediately recognizable affinity of style, or a family resemblance – the practices of a single agent, or, more broadly, the practices of all agents endowed with similar habitus, owe the affinity of style that makes each a metaphor for all the others to the fact that they are the product of the implementation in different fields of the same schemata or perception, thought, and action' (Bourdieu 1996, p. 273).

Children are socialised into their particular habitus. Through exposure to friends and family (of the same social group) they develop the schemata by which they learn to organise their thoughts and actions, resulting in the development of certain attitudes that appear 'natural' but are in fact a direct consequence of one's upbringing. It is another way of conceiving the process of socialisation into a particular 'life-world', providing individuals with a sense of their place in the world ('knowing your place') and thereby ascribing the range of necessities and possibilities that they attach to their everyday lives.

Examples of habitus can be drawn from research on the 'underclass thesis.' Massey and Denton (1993) provide a compelling account of the creation and perpetuation of ghettoised communities in the United States. Resulting from the intersection of a number of social and spatial variables, a 'culture of segregation' has arisen within particular geographically defined areas ('black ghettos'). Indicating profound social implications, these patterns have enabled the development of 'divergent' speech practices, limiting the possibility of communication and social interaction outside the social group. Massey and Denton (1993) write: 'In response to the harsh and isolated conditions of ghetto life, a segment of the urban black population has evolved a set of behaviours, attitudes, and values that are increasingly at variance with those held in the wider society. Although these adaptations represent rational accommodations to social and economic conditions within the ghetto, they are not widely accepted or understood outside of it, and in fact are



negatively evaluated by most of American society' (pp. 165 - 166). Another excellent example of the spatial and social development of habitus is found in William Julius Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). He has been concerned to explicate the links between labour market participation and the local social environment, specifically the impact of 'neighbourhood'. In later work (1991) he develops this idea, combining, conceptually, external 'structural effects' with 'the individual's social milieu' (p. 10). He strongly implies the role of habitus in defining individual life chances and, perhaps more importantly, individual *perceptions* of life chances.

In these circumstances, habitus has developed out of physical immobility and geographical isolation. More examples can be drawn from scholarship on the 'geography of education'. Some models of educational attainment, for example, describe the influence of 'neighbourhood'; distinguishing between 'those variables relating to educational attainment which describes individuals and those which relate to the properties of the system in which people find themselves' (Garner 1988, p. 29). Analysis has shown neighbourhood deprivation to have a negative impact on children's educational attainment, over and above the influences attributed to home and school (ibid; see also Garner and Raudenbush 1991, Herbert and Thomas 1998). <sup>11</sup>

These studies and conceptual frameworks are useful because they provide, through comparison, a means of understanding the distinctive habitus of my participants. Theirs,

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<sup>11</sup> As observed by Lamont and Lareau (1988), the underlying assumption of Bourdieu's work, that 'dominated' groups in society possess culture only in relation to 'dominant' groups, needs to be tempered by the recognition of the accumulation of cultural capital across society. The active accumulation of cultural capital should not be confined to discussions of middle-class or wealthy families. The tenor of much of this literature is that middle-class families are somehow more astute, cleverer, and more strategic. They are able to adapt to their environment whereas working class and poor families merely confront their environment, or 'get by'. I think only of Loic Wacquant's (1999) examination of 'The Social Art of the Hustler in the American Ghetto' for an excellent example of the adaptation and utilisation of symbolic capital in a 'less privileged' social milieu. This is a huge oversight and one that needs to be rectified. My thesis does not attempt to do this, but merely urges that this be done.

in contrast, revolves around the possibility of *mobility* and the anticipation of educational/occupational *success*. Their social networks arise not from geographical isolation but from family histories of transnational migration. Travelling long distances in search of educational opportunities was a prospect known to them from an early age, just as succeeding in education was perceived a fundamental *necessity*, not an option or a favourable outcome. Pursuing a successful career and maintaining their parents' standard of living was expected. These are of course not 'natural' instincts, but attitudes developed through socialisation and yet they appeared natural to my participants. When I asked about the possibility of them *not* attending university I was met with incredulity – 'but then I wouldn't get a good job!' Accepting Bourdieu's explanation, this reflects a worldview that is largely consequent upon their upbringing within a type of social group (class). They perceive particular profits accruing from investment in education, by virtue of their (social) access to specific job markets (incorporating transnational corporations and aspirations to managerial posts in Hong Kong). Investment in education has been assumed to offer high returns.

### **Cultural capital, habitus and mobility**

*Participants knew from an early age that they would leave Hong Kong...at some point...*

Edward: Oh yeah, I mean, I know that I will be going somewhere to study. I was definitely not going to stay in Hong Kong, so it's either the States, the UK, or Canada. (*Hong Kong Interview*)

Spatial mobility has played a central role in the social reproduction of middle-class families, particularly in the execution of strategies centred upon educational choice. Yet

its significance has been rarely discussed. This is one of the main theoretical contributions of my thesis and here it is brought to the fore. One outstanding exception is found in a study by sociologists Ball, Bowe and Gerwitz (1995), examining 'the interplay between social class, cultural capital and [educational] choice' (pp. 52 – 53) in the context of Greater London. Their research utilises a qualitative methodology, involving in-depth interviews with 70 parents of year 6 school children, in the process of choosing a secondary school. In their own words, their study has two principal objectives:

'one is substantive; to present an account of class related patterns of schooling in the context of the new 'market' in education. The other is theoretical; to move beyond the simple empiricism of much parental choice research and begin to develop a conceptual system within which parental choice can be analysed sociologically.' (p. 52)

They identify 'three clear circuits of schooling which relate differently to choice, class and space.' Distinguished by social class, 'different groups of parents 'plug into' each of the circuits and each circuit empowers its students differently in terms of life chances.' (p. 53) They continue: 'the pattern of class-related orientations to choice in the whole data set is strong. Altogether middle-class 'choosers' are much more active in the education market place' (p. 56). I highlight this particular study to exemplify several issues that relate directly to my thesis, albeit at a different scale. Most importantly, they draw explicit links between the social class of parents and the tendency to move, physically, for education.

In their typology, parents are described as either 'working class locals' or 'middle class cosmopolitans' – the former opting invariably for the *local*, state funded secondary school, whilst the latter deciding to travel beyond the immediate locality. They write: 'for many middle-class parents travel and distance emerge as contingent factors, not priority

or determinate ones' (Ball et al. 1995, p. 65) As I will demonstrate, their notion of 'middle class cosmopolitans' is highly applicable to my research participants and their families, who think nothing of moving *internationally* to seek out educational opportunities.

Their framework also incorporates many of the concepts discussed to this point. They argue, for example, that educational choice is related to 'different class strategies of reproduction' (p. 57); middle-class families, especially, use education to secure their status in society. Their framework suggests that the *ability* of parents to make choices in respect to education is directly related to the presence or absence of family *cultural capital* and that cultural capital varies by social class (see Bourdieu 1984, Coleman 1988). Like Bourdieu (1986), they insist that middle-class children are able to devote more time to the pursuit of education because they are relatively free from the practical necessities and structural limitations (including *spatial* limitations) imposed by financial constraints. In addition, middle-class parents were able to access 'multiple sources of information relating to the reputations and practices of the schools [...]' (p. 66). They continue: '*The point is that these reputations (or the existence of this circuit of schools) are not even apparent to other 'local choosers'*' (emphasis in original, p. 56 - 57). And, they also discuss the different *aspirations* of working- and middle-class parents, involving different degrees of long-term investment in education:

'The schooling of children of these working class families is not normally related to long range planning, it is not about other places and other times but very much about the here and now. Parental aspirations are often vague. [...] The middle-class 'cosmopolitan' families are more likely to 'imagine' their children as dentists or accountants or artists, at university, in the sixth form; whereas the working class 'locals' will 'wait and see' [,] they are less likely to speculate about the future of their offspring.' (p. 60)

The parallels between the findings of Ball et al. (1995) for this local educational market in Greater London and mine for the international market are striking, suggesting that very similar processes are at work. My participants demonstrated a range of attributes associated with middle-class family status, the use of family cultural capital, long-term planning and a willingness to travel long-distances in pursuit of educational opportunities. They experienced, for example, significant pressure to conform to very specific parental aspirations, involving a particular and widespread conception of academic 'success', corresponding to a narrow range of subjects, institutions (i.e. reputable universities) and possible career paths.

There are two further studies of note, undertaken by geographers in the UK, which draw similar conclusions about the relationship between social class, educational choices and mobility. Butler (2003) has examined the day-to-day experiences of 75 middle-class 'gentrifiers' in Islington, north London, finding that the paths of this group and those of a proximate working-class population rarely crossed, either figuratively or literally. Butler uses Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'habitus' in an attempt to capture a sense of the social group isolation, resulting in similar behaviour patterns. One example upon which he draws to demonstrate this evident lack of social mixing concerns decision-making vis-à-vis children's schooling; every middle-class family in his sample chose to send their children outside the borough, despite the presence of local schools, underlining yet again the crucial correlation between parental 'choice', social class and spatial mobility. Interestingly, many of the parents within these families knew each other from university. Butler (2003) writes: 'This reinforces a sense of gentrification as being based around

networks of university graduates who move around through life in a kind of ‘bubble’ which their children are apparently inhabiting in similar sorts of ways’ (p. 2483).

The second notable study that I want to mention here examines ‘the choices and experiences of higher education students living in the parental home’ (Holdsworth 2003, p. 1). Holdsworth has considered the impacts of widening participation in higher education within the UK upon patterns of student mobility; specifically, she considers the different experiences of students who had ‘left home’ to attend higher education and those who continued to live with parents, based on a survey of 3, 282 students in Greater Merseyside. She raises several points in her main findings with, I suggest, implications for studying long-distance spatial mobility. Students who lived in the parental home were less likely than those who had left home to have parents or grandparents who went to university. They were more likely to come from ‘lower socio-economic classes’ than the movers. When asked why they chose to stay living with their parents, 78 percent gave financial reasons. These students were less likely to ask family for money and more likely to take paid work during the university semester (possibly, I would suggest, impacting their ability to achieve to the highest level at university). Perhaps one of the most interesting findings concerns the impact of immobility/mobility on social life; students living at home were far less likely to participate in university activities. This, I would assume, means that they would be far less likely to make friendships outside their usual social circle, thereby potentially limiting the ‘usefulness’ of alumni networks functioning as ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter 1973) in later life. I will show with reference to my own research participants how important university alumni, established through migration to Vancouver, are for the employment experiences of returnees back in Hong Kong. Like the subjects of Butler’s (2003) study, my participants conceivably ‘lived in a

bubble', rarely socialising outside their ethnic group. In contrast to Holdsworth's (2003) working-class respondents, however, these were *relationships formed through mobility*; migration enabled not only the development of cultural capital but also valuable social capital. In the chapter that follows, I begin my in-depth empirical study in Hong Kong, examining the particular political, economic and cultural context within which and through which education-led migration becomes a possibility and a reality.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **EDUCATION AND MIDDLE-CLASS STRATEGIES IN CONTEMPORARY HONG KONG**

‘[T]he share in profits which scarce cultural capital secures in class-divided societies is based, in the last analysis, on the fact that all agents do not have the economic and cultural means for prolonging their children’s education beyond the minimum necessary for the reproduction of the labor-power least valorized at a given moment.’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245)

‘[T]he changing relationship between education and occupational stratification should be understood in terms of group conflict over scarce resources (credentials, income, occupational status). This is because the middle classes have been increasingly dependent upon access to professional occupations as a means of reproducing social status and privileged life-styles between the generations, and given a bureaucratisation of the recruitment process where access to virtually all occupational careers has come to depend upon the acquisition of credentials through formal examination.’ (Brown 1995, p. 31)

This chapter is concerned with explicating the *context* of the transnational educational strategies engaged by middle-class households from Hong Kong. I ask: under what circumstances does migration (wherein the primary motive is education) become a reality? What drives the tendency to seek an overseas education? Through an analysis of various data, I contend that two broad forces shape the motivations underlying these strategies. On the one hand, participants’ thoughts and actions are determined by the wider external economic and political milieu. I have identified recent economic restructuring, the expansion of public education and the 1997 ‘handover’ of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China leading to a mass exodus of population from Hong Kong during the late 1980s and early to mid 1990s as representing three important facets of this milieu. On the other hand, participants are deeply conditioned by their distinctive *class habitus* (Bourdieu 1986) – a consequence, in part, of wider societal conditions but



also tied to the personal histories and socio-economic circumstances of their families.<sup>1</sup> I begin this discussion with some more general observations regarding middle-class interests and education in advanced industrial societies.

### **Middle-class insecurities and educational strategies**

Parkin (1979) here describes the role of credentialism in the social reproduction of class privilege in 'modern capitalist society':

'the two main exclusionary devices by which the bourgeoisie constructs and maintains itself as a class are, first, those surrounding the institutions of property; and, second, academic or professional qualifications and credentials. Each represents a set of legal arrangements for restricting access to rewards and privileges: property ownership is a form of closure designed to prevent general access to the means of production and its fruits; credentialism is a form of closure designed to control and monitor entry to key positions in the division of labour.' (quoted in Brown 1995, p. 30)

At the time when Parkin wrote these words, post-secondary education was very much a minority pursuit. The most desirable jobs remained wedded to credentials that not everyone could, or even tried to attain. Today, in some of the more economically prosperous countries, university entrance is almost the normal progression following secondary education.<sup>2</sup> Exclusive ownership of academic credentials as described by Parkin has therefore ostensibly abated, with consequences for the status of middle-class populations at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this vein, Brown et al. (1997) have argued that:

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<sup>1</sup> In respect of this later point, conspicuous similarities between participants have led me to ponder the existence of a *common habitus*, which can be related to 'educational' migration more generally.

<sup>2</sup> This debate is an ongoing one in the UK today. Along side the implementation of tuition fees the present government envisages 50 percent of university-age students attaining higher educational qualifications within the next few years, thereby transforming the symbolic meaning of the university degree.

‘During the period of economic nationalism the burgeoning middle class benefited most from the expansion of the welfare state, employment security, and the opportunities afforded by comprehensive education and the expansion of post-compulsory provision [...] Now, it is not working-class resistance to education which represents the primary sources of class conflict [...] but *the exclusionary tactics of the middle classes at a time of profound personal and social uncertainty and insecurity*. With the breakdown of economic nationalism, the demise of bureaucratic careers and the attendant risks of downward mobility have led the middle classes to reassert their vested interests in an attempt to maximise the reproduction of their class advantage.’ (pp. 14 – 15, emphasis added)

This thesis is concerned, in large part, with these ‘exclusionary tactics of the middle classes at a time of profound personal and social uncertainty and insecurity’. It examines what I perceive to be the important links between expanding educational opportunities in Hong Kong (and East and Southeast Asia more generally), the perceived threat to the social and economic status of middle-class sectors of society and the pursuit of overseas education. As Brown et al. have argued, middle-class populations will, as a consequence of educational expansion and ensuing ‘uncertainty’, either ‘seek to change the class mechanisms of exclusion and selection in education, or they will secede from state education’ (Brown et al. 1997, p. 15). The overseas education, in my view, exemplifies the secession from state education by Hong Kong’s middle-classes. It can also be conceived as a new means of selection and exclusion, facilitating access to some of the most desired careers in contemporary Hong Kong. I will spend a few moments discussing some of the key theoretical contributions to scholarship that deal explicitly with the issue of educational expansion and middle-class insecurities, before clarifying my own specific take on these processes, incorporating transnational migration circuits and the accumulation of cultural capital.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Philip Brown (1995) offer some insightful observations upon the specific relationship between the education systems of advanced industrial societies and the reproduction of class privilege. Here Bourdieu (1984) comments, in general terms, on the effects of the 'democratisation' of education:

'One important factor in intensifying this competition [for academic credentials] has doubtless been the fact that those fractions of the dominant class and middle class who are richest in economic capital (i.e. industrial and commercial employers, craftsmen and tradesmen) have had to make greatly increased use of the educational system in order to ensure social reproduction. *When class fractions who previously made little use of the school system enter the race for academic qualifications, the effect is to force the groups whose reproduction was mainly or exclusively achieved through education to step up their investments so as to maintain the relative scarcity of their qualifications and, consequently, their position in the class structure.* Academic qualifications and the school system which awards them thus become one of the key stakes in an interclass competition which generates a general and continuous growth in the demand for education and an inflation of academic qualifications.' (p.133, emphasis added)

There are many means by which middle-class families in Hong Kong have 'stepped up' their investments 'so as to maintain the relative scarcity of their qualifications'. As I will demonstrate, parents spend significant sums of money on tutors for their children, on extra books and revision materials and on supplementary classes. They also spend *time* helping their children with their schoolwork and the children themselves are freed from any 'extra' family obligations.<sup>3</sup> Even then, however, these investments are not foolproof. A general mood of pessimism and uncertainty prevails, as was evident from my interviews. Brown (1995) has argued that Bourdieu has 'exaggerated the inevitability of middle-class reproduction': 'The perceived 'risks' associated with economic restructuring, unemployment and educational change since the mid-1970s have made

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<sup>3</sup> From my interviews it seemed as though children spent all of their time outside of school on either school work or extra curricula activities designed to enrich their curriculum vitas. They would not, for example, be expected to spend time on housework, shopping, or visiting relatives.

parents more aware of the uncertainties of success and the consequences of failure' (p. 33) (see also Ehrenreich 1989). In Hong Kong, this uncertainty can be traced to a general process of economic restructuring, a result of the shock of the 1997/98 Pacific Asia crisis, as organisations (particularly in the financial sector) have moved towards 'leaner' corporate structures (Beaverstock and Doel 2001), destabilising career paths and long term assumptions about career development (Brown 1995). I now turn to examine the empirical data that relate to these theoretical claims.

### **Pessimism and uncertainty**

In support of Brown's (1995) assertions, my interviews betrayed a distinct uneasiness about the future; there prevailed a sense of personal insecurity closely tied to a general pessimism regarding Hong Kong's impending fate in the global economy. As Alison here suggests:

**Alison: I'm not very optimistic about Hong Kong's future...Maybe... it's not a really good place to live right now. It's not like before.**

*JW: Is it just the economy or are you worried about the government?*

**A: Like, the whole society. Before people, when you go outside people can be very cheerful. Well, they are not as friendly as Canadians, they won't say 'hi' and stuff. But at least they were a lot more cheerful than right now. Because maybe they worry about their job, and then lots of stuff, and they are not as cheerful as before. You can see it in lots of people's faces. They are not happy any more. And the atmosphere is not so cheerful. (Alison is an immigrant student at UBC)**

These concerns go some way towards explaining the urgency with which education is sought, the perceived *necessity* of obtaining higher, specialised credentials (e.g. the MBA), and the persistent fear of unemployment. Benjamin, a graduate of UBC now

working in Hong Kong, explains how the processes of credential inflation and economic restructuring have combined to devalue the cultural capital of (even) overseas degree holders in Hong Kong:

**Benjamin:** I over-expected what I can do, what I can get, in Hong Kong.

*JW: Explain.*

**B:** Right now there is an economic downturn in Hong Kong and Asia. [It] has impacted so much. It has also impacted us as overseas students. It didn't give us any advantage, benefits or privilege compared to the past. So we might be over-expecting and then we find that a degree is just a commodity. It might be easier to get a job but the salary and future is even worse. I was too over-expectant...In Hong Kong at this moment you get paid for work and you can *only* survive, and it's not that secure too...in terms of job security.

*JW: Is that stressful?*

**B:** Not to me because I'm planning on studying anyway - I've got plans to quit my job.

As Bourdieu (1984, 1996) would predict, Benjamin plans to augment his existing cultural capital through further education. He has it in mind to study for an MBA, thereby acquiring less common, more specialised credentials, with a higher market value. This option is only open to him, however, because of the resources arising from his class position. He has already attained the necessary two years work experience in an esteemed position, he has saved some financial capital to enable him to quit his job as he studies, and he has, also, the unwavering support of his family, both materially and emotionally. These kinds of unstated privileges say much about the relationship between the acquisition of these specialised qualifications and the social background of the holder.

Yet class rivalry for the fruits of education is not the only basis of insecurity. There is another source of hitherto insignificant challenge, threatening to undermine the cultural

capital of Hong Kong's middle-class children – Mainland China. China achieves almost mythical status in discussions of the future of Hong Kong. It is perceived as a potentially formidable yet highly unpredictable market – a world economic leader of the future that will either swallow up the tiny land area of Hong Kong in its wake, or offer limitless opportunities for Hong Kong's residents, and especially the 'Western educated' now residing in Hong Kong. A great deal of the uncertainty (political, economic and social) expressed by my participants can be traced to a fear of China. In the following interview extract, two UBC graduates attempt to explain their sense of Hong Kong's future:

*Tammy is an accountant and Rees is an investment banker. Both work for the same large multinational corporation in Hong Kong.*

**Rees:** Well, China is coming up. Shanghai is coming up. So if they clean up Shanghai and they clean up Beijing then everything will move there, right? Hong Kong is still very peripheral and so why would anyone want to come to Hong Kong again? Things are very expensive here. I just see it going down.

**Tammy:** I agree with him. You can see that Hong Kong is losing its competitive edge. What it used to have – people making money from property – is going down. And you can see why. A lot of people are leaving Hong Kong – either going back to China or elsewhere. Property is going down, property is not something for the future. People are making money now but it's not like creating an industry. And then I think for almost all the businesses, I heard they are all pro-China, talking about the development of the 'China market' and putting all their emphasis on the 'China market'. For example, for my firm - I work for Price Waterhouse Coopers, so obviously the big target for the last couple of years has been developing the China market, getting China. But at the same time the only reason that they need Hong Kong right now is that they still have professional staff here. They need qualified accountants to do the auditing in China, because no one would believe it if it was done by the Chinese accountants. But you can see that ten years from now all the qualified accountants will be in China. You can see that once China starts going into the WTO [World Trade Organisation] and stuff like that, people will start recognising accountant licences in China. Right now accountants in China, they have to take exams...[that] don't get recognised outside of China. Hong Kong is recognised because it goes with the UK. And a lot of people are from overseas. Like for me, right, I need the American licence, AICPA [American Institute of

**Certified Public Accountants], so obviously this is internationally recognisable. But you can see that ten years from now they can just move the staff over from China. You can see the trend is going downwards. Yes, I'm not too optimistic.**

Hong Kong will be able to maintain its competitive edge, they suggest, as long as it retains a hold on its cultural capital advantage vis-à-vis Mainland China, and even that is under threat. Chiu (2002), writing for the *South China Morning Post*, here describes an interview with the head of the 'Greater China Affairs' group of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) in Hong Kong:

She...stressed that the increasing quality of mainland-trained professionals meant that Hong Kong accountants no longer had as much of a competitive advantage.

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu tax principal Calvin Lam Wai-ming said a pool of mainland middle managers, trained by the big firms in the past five to six years, was emerging who could compete with Hong Kong-trained accountants.

'To retain the [competitive] advantage, Hong Kong professionals should upgrade themselves to work at senior management levels,' Mr Lam said.

According to a survey conducted by the association this month, 171 of the 225 ACCA members interviewed were either stationed in China or travelled there regularly for work.

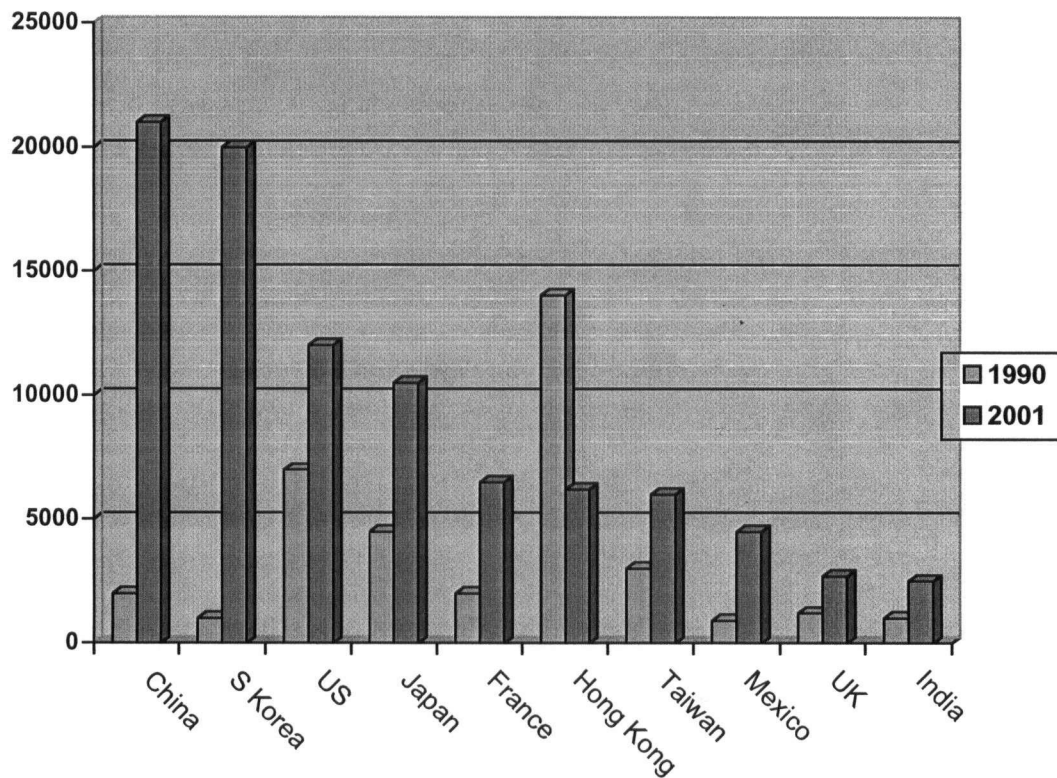
About 57 per cent of respondents were at the manager, senior manager or financial controller level.

It is those with 'overseas exposure' that are desirable in China because, up until recently, many more Hong Kong persons went overseas for education than Mainlanders.

The call to "upgrade themselves" has not been lost on my participants, as I will show. More generally, Mainland Chinese students are gaining the cultural capital advantage bestowed by overseas education. Recent figures on the global flow of international

students indicate Mainland China to be heading a new trend in overseas study, substantially outnumbering students from Hong Kong (figure 6.1).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 6.1: Top 10 Source Countries of Foreign Students  
1990 and 2001**



Source: The Monitor, Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2003

<sup>4</sup> The number of Chinese students from the PRC in Canada in 2001 was over 20,000 compared to just over 6,000 from Hong Kong. The chart also shows the significant changes in numbers between 1990 and 2001. This excludes the number of immigrant students, however.



### **Educational expansion and credential inflation**

There is little doubt that 'credential inflation' is germane to both Hong Kong and Taiwan and, as the following interview extracts indicate, it has become a real concern of immigrant students:

**Dave:** Right now in the market, the standard is to get a bachelor's degree, right? Everyone should have that. It seems that way.

**Kelly:** Umm...I think the requirements for the jobs back then [a generation ago] were less...Like, right now people are getting Master's and PhDs and stuff like that. So it's going higher and higher.

I asked Emma if she thought the importance of education has changed over the years:

**Emma:** I think so. My grandpa, they didn't really have education. Like, they worked their way through and they started industry and stuff. And then there's my parents' [generation], I think only one of my uncles actually graduated from university. I think he graduated from the University of Alberta. I think they [her parents] were just high school grads. My mum would always say 'it's a different generation'. Back then, high school grads can probably get a good job, but now, it's like a graduate degree isn't probably enough. Probably a Master's or probably even a PhD or something like that. I think it has changed.

Combined with the recent economic recession, competition for credentials translates into anxiety for middle-class students with a keen interest in local job-market conditions:

**Angie:** Actually there's very high pressure, yeah, high pressure on the students [in Hong Kong...] Hong Kong people are always under pressure, stressful.

*JW: Why, do you think?*

**Angie: Because the minimum education in Hong Kong, I think, is university right now. [And] because the economy is not that good right now, especially in Asian countries, because the stock market has fallen down.**

Steve compares his circumstances to those of his parents twenty years ago:

**Steve: Maybe at that time people think if you graduate from university you can definitely get a good job. Now it doesn't in Taiwan. Even if you graduate from a university in Taiwan. Now they look at your skill and not your diploma.**

*JW: What are they looking for?*

**S: Some high skill like computers...people they don't have in their company. They won't look at your diploma because there are too many universities in Taiwan right now.**

Credential inflation is, I argue, intimately related to the recent expansion of public education in East and Southeast Asia. Like Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore, Hong Kong's present administration is appreciably concerned with the state of public education in the territory, and with widening access. In recent government publications, Hong Kong's past, present, and future economic development are discussed explicitly in terms of 'human capital' and the need, consequently, to maintain a high level of education through schooling (Gov. Info. 2002, Education Department 2002a). In 2000 - 2001, education accounted for 22 percent of the government's total expenditure. Children receive nine years of free education, from the ages of 6 to 15, after which uniform tuition fees are applied.<sup>5</sup> In 2000, around 96 percent of children aged 6 to 14 were receiving full time education, and around 83 percent of ages 15 to 16 (*ibid.*). According to one report published in 2002, approximately '23 percent of Hong Kong's population is at school or kindergarten' (Education Department 2002a, p. 1).

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<sup>5</sup> For 2002 - 2003, these were HK\$5, 050 per annum for Secondary 4 (S4) and Secondary 5 (S5), and HK\$8, 750 per annum for S6 and S7 (*Hong Kong Education Department 2002a*, p. 1).

Successive reform of the education system throughout the 1970s and 1980s contrasts starkly with a previous government indifference. Lee and Cheung (1992) have identified two main issues addressed by various policy papers during this period: the expansion of school places at different levels of schooling, and the mechanisms of school place allocation.

Secondary schooling was transformed from an 'elite' to a 'mass' institution. In the 1960s and 1970s, only one third of those finishing Primary 6 could obtain a place in secondary school, compared to virtually all by 1990 (Lee and Cheung 1992). The debate then began to shift to the *allocation* of places.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s, students who performed poorly in the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) followed one of two paths. Those who could afford to could buy their continued access to education through private schools; those who could not had to enter the labour market. This exam was abolished in 1977 to be replaced by the Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA) in 1978. Primary and secondary schools were then divided into 5 bands (of different ability) based on the scaled internal assessments of students. These assessments took the form of Academic Aptitude Tests (AAT), and intense competition within and between schools inevitably ensued:

'The Education Department has made repeated calls upon schools not to use rote drills to prepare their students for the AAT [...] However, many schools start drilling their students as early as P5 [primary 5], using mock AAT questions prepared by commercial publishers, with a view to qualifying their students for prestigious secondary schools' (Choi 1999, p. 406).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of similar debates previously within Europe, see Richardson 1986.

<sup>7</sup> Since my participants have left Hong Kong, there have been changes to this system. The allocation of Primary One Admission is now made by 'the principle of vicinity [...] the objective is to reduce the incentive for drilling children in early childhood education.' In effect from the 2000/2001 school year, the government has abolished the AAT 'to enable students and teachers to concentrate their efforts on meaningful learning activities'. Also, the number of school bands has been reduced from five to three ([www.info.gov.hk/info.edreform.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/info.edreform.htm)), accessed 18/11/02.

These tests have entrenched a culture of learning-by-rote, and an excessive emphasis on examination success. As I will discuss in chapter 9, this academic culture has very real, material implications for *local* graduates in Hong Kong, and assumptions about the nature of their cultural capital.<sup>8</sup>

Figures connecting university entrance to 'social class' would seem to depict a relatively meritocratic system. As Lee and Cheung (1992) have written:

'In the case of Hong Kong, the proportion of working-class children among university students, a very good indicator of the extent of social mobility through education, had been over 70 percent for the Chinese University of Hong Kong and only slightly lower for the University of Hong Kong' (p. 164).<sup>9</sup>

With over 70 percent of students from working-class backgrounds, the system of higher education in Hong Kong does not seem to favour middle-class interests. Yet, there is another interpretation of these figures, offered by Lee and Cheung, of immense importance for this thesis. They continue:

'[however] this *excludes the larger number of Hong Kong students that attain their university education overseas, the majority of whom are middle-class*' (p. 164, emphasis added).

This apparently insignificant qualification goes to the heart of my argument. It demonstrates the ability of middle-class parents to exercise 'market choice' to the

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<sup>8</sup> Even the government has come to recognise the problems with rote learning and the employment implications for local students. A recent statement claimed: 'A series of new education initiatives have been launched over the past five years to enhance the quality of education. The focus has been to move away from the learning-by-rote system to one that provides children with a more well-rounded education that encourages curiosity...' (Gov. Info. 2002)

<sup>9</sup> Compare this with the universities in the UK: 'the proportion of state school pupils entering Oxford and Cambridge has remained at around 55%, of which working-class pupils make up, at best, 10%, since 1999' (Pallis, 2003, *The Guardian*)

extreme. They are able (in several senses of the word)<sup>10</sup> to move great distances for their children's education. 'Schools and universities in Hong Kong are missing middle-class students!' lamented a retired headteacher, interviewed in her Hong Kong apartment in February 2003. The apartment block, she told me, is highly desired for its location, overlooking a 'band one' school ('one of the most desirable schools in Hong Kong').<sup>11</sup> Yet, when the children in this block reach a certain age most will just disappear. They all go overseas; the academically gifted go for the perceived opportunities afforded by a Western education, and the examination 'failures' because they have no choice if they wish to continue in formal education. Like Lisa, several participants told of how classmates began to drop off before the HKCEE.

**Lisa: I think in Hong Kong it's usual, like a lot of my friends in my class, in grade 11, they go. They go. There were thirty persons and now there is just like ten of them left studying. All of them go to Australia, England, mostly those two places. And Canada they usually immigrate. And if they study just, they usually go to Australia or England.**

Emma has observed a similar pattern of education-related emigration amongst her extended family:

*JW: When did the first family member come to Canada?*

**Emma: I think it was my uncle. He came for education and then his family came. I guess they got the citizenship thing then they moved back. And then my other uncles and aunties came over to Vancouver and all my, it's weird. All my cousins – I have 11, 12 cousins above me – and they're all...at least 7 of them graduated from Vancouver, high school, college, UBC, SFU...within**

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<sup>10</sup> I have discussed in Chapter 5 how the ability to exercise choice is a function of several facets of social class status, including knowledge of the system, social resources (e.g. family overseas), and material/financial resources.

<sup>11</sup> Catchment area is still one factor in the school allocation system. As has been noted in the UK (Townsend 2003, *The Observer*) parents will buy properties for considerable sums in order to locate in the catchment area of a coveted school.

**Vancouver. I'm like *the only one* who actually completed the whole high school system in Hong Kong.**

Emma clearly felt that her cousins had, by going overseas, taken the easy way out.

At the beginning of the 1980s only 2 percent of students of university age had access to higher education in Hong Kong, increasing to 8 percent by 1990. It was around this time that many of my participants were entering secondary school, perceiving a highly restricted and highly competitive system.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, there was no guarantee that they would be able to obtain a university degree by remaining in Hong Kong. At the same time, international education was widely acknowledged to be both 'easy' (Shrive 1992) and 'a strong tradition' invoking academic excellence (ibid).<sup>13</sup> During colonial rule, scholarships had financed the flow of students to the UK, and many British expatriates taught in local schools. Of the 10, 000 or so Hong Kong students hosted by American universities during the 1980s, writes Shrive (1992), 'Most have returned and taken jobs in the private sector economy, leaving the governmental posts for local graduates. Hong Kong has at least 50, 000 alumni from American universities' (p. 220); today, it has at least 1, 000 from UBC. 'Returning graduates from overseas constitute the best technology transfer program in the world. Hong Kong's international work force has been leavened year after year by the ideas, skills, and outlook that returning students have put to work...' (p. 223). The perception of overseas graduates was clearly in the affirmative.

It was in this context of widening access, entrenched credentialisation of the most desirable (middle-class) jobs, and the positive affirmation of the overseas degree, that my

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<sup>12</sup> Since 1992, enrolment in publicly funded universities has risen from 42 567 to 60 105 persons (in 2001) (Hong Kong Education Department 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Shrive (1992) has written: 'Hong Kong has about the same number of students in local higher education as in overseas higher education' (p. 223). I assume this statement excludes immigrant students overseas. If these were included, the total overseas difference would no doubt be staggering.

participants attended school in Hong Kong. Competition within schools was intense, as

Emma (presently a student at UBC), here explains:

*JW: Talk about education in Hong Kong. Why is it so competitive?*

**Emma:** I guess 'cause, it's not actually a country, right? And there are so many people in it. And everybody, they need a job. They need education. The first nine years of education in Hong Kong is free. And after then – grade 10 – you have to pay. And I don't think all Hong Kong people are rich. There are those that live in huts. They need education too. Even poor people like to study like crazy. Their houses are smaller than this living room probably. You know how Chinese people like kids right? Two parents and three or four kids all stuck in here...It's not much but they do study really well. And then everyone is so competitive. And the hierarchy just pushes up so you have...In my school, when I took the grade 10 provincial thing, there were five classes for one grade. And then after that exam there were two classes. And then there's the grade 13 exam. That gets a couple of thousand people into [university] so people are just competitive because they want higher education. And everybody is like, where did you graduate, did you graduate after grade 13 or did you take diplomas, high[er] dips...? Stuff like that. So the hierarchy is, like, *wow*. Sharp.

In Emma's vivid depiction, the competitive nature of schooling is especially underscored – 'even the poor people' are making immeasurable sacrifices for their children's education. A similar situation would seem to be manifest throughout East and Southeast Asia (*Time Asia*, 2002). As an educational consultant to immigrant parents, Penny claims an extensive understanding of the nature of different education systems. Here she describes the life-long implications of success or failure in Taiwan's schools:

**Penny:** In Taiwan they have the exams and tests, exams and tests, [in] every subject. There is big competition, in a big class and a lot of students who want to get in a good high school. Especially for high school, the kids at the age of 15 have to take these exams and in order to get into the number 1 high school, number 2 high school, number 3 they have a list of everything and they get the result of which schools they can be accepted. So if you graduate from the top one then, oh, for your whole life you are being looked up to. (*Penny is a private educational consultant (and immigrant) working between Vancouver and Taiwan.*)

*Her husband recruits students for overseas study in Taiwan and she helps place the children in schools in Vancouver)*

Examinations, it seems, are the focus of everything.

In 1982, a child in Hong Kong could expect to face up to eight formal examinations during his or her school career, leading an OECD report to conclude that Hong Kong is excessively 'exam driven' (OECD, 1982; reported in Choi 1999). In a more recent review, Choi (1999) argues that whilst circumstances have clearly changed (there are now only two formal examinations),

'examinations are still very much at the heart of the community. Each year when public examination results are released, the media takes pains to scour the schools in a bid to identify the top candidates [...] to report their success stories. This emphasis on examinations is, in part, due to the pervasive tenet of Chinese culture that academic credentials are superior to other qualifications and to the fact that examination results are the main determinants for admission to sixth form and higher education in Hong Kong.' (p. 405)

He provides a comprehensive review of the two key examinations that have caused my participants such stress and, in some cases, distress: the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). The first is taken at the end of form 5 (equivalent to grade 10 in Canada), and the second, 2 years later. In chapter 8, I will consider how the *timing* of many immigration applications *coincided*, explicitly and implicitly, with these examination periods (the modal age of my participants at the time the immigration application was made was 15, just prior to the HKCEE)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Current government policy is to provide sixth-form (grades 11 and 12) education places for one third of the corresponding cohort. Students opt for a science-, arts-, or commercial- stream in S4 (grade 9), two years prior to sitting the HKALE. In 2002, 127,616 students sat the HKCEE and 36,999 sat the HKALE (Education Department 2002)



Recently, Hong Kong has seen a marked expansion in the number of higher and further education institutions, with the dual effect of diluting the value of a local degree whilst also increasing the stakes for those who fail to get into what are considered to be the 'top' three: the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Presently, Hong Kong has eleven degree-awarding institutes, eight of which are publicly funded through the University Grants Committee (UGC) (Education Department 2002). Agnes here illustrates these changes, highlighting the impact on the perceived value of a local degree:

**Agnes: Actually all my siblings are working in Hong Kong. My elder sister is working in a bank. She is a senior grade – she earns a lot. Because she graduated in the University of Hong Kong many years ago. Because it's different for people who graduate there many years ago and right now. Because there's too many universities in Hong Kong right now. But a long time ago there were only 2 universities. People who got into universities [back then] had very good prospects and future.**

Several of my interviewees made similar statements about the devaluation of the local degree and the need, therefore, to seek something greater for themselves.

### **Additional precipitating factors**

#### **The economic milieu**

Additional factors have been decisive in participants' choices with regards to education, migration, and career, and the prevailing economic milieu is perhaps one of the most critical. Following the economic boom and the birth of the 'Asian Tigers' during the 1980s, Hong Kong became, according to World Bank criteria, a high-income country with a per capita GNP greater than a number of more 'industrialised' states, including the

UK and Canada (Dicken 2003). Within East and Southeast Asia, Hong Kong functions as a regional headquarters for banking; it has one of the most significant representations of international banks in the world (containing 75 of the 100 world's top banks) and is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest international banking centre in terms of external assets. There are 102 representative offices of foreign banks in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Trade and Development Council 2002).

According to official government reports, the Special Administrative Region (SAR) has undergone 'profound structural change' during the last decade (Hong Kong Trade and Development Council 2002). The contribution of the 'service sector' to GDP rose from 74 percent in 1990 to 86 percent in 2000, when 'wholesale, retail and import/export trades, restaurants and hotels' became the largest contributor (at 26 percent), followed closely by 'financing, insurance, real estate and business services' (23 percent). Correspondingly, the share of managers, administrators, professionals and associate professionals in total employment has increased significantly for every major sector between 1993 and 2001. Overall, the number of jobs available in finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) increased from 24 to 32 percent of total service sector employment, increasing their share of total employment from 8 percent to 15 percent in ten years.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the local manufacturing sector represented only 6 percent of GDP in 2000 (compared to 18 percent in 1990). Its share of total employment between 1993 and 2001 decreased from 24.5 to 7 percent. Manufacturing processes have been continually relocated to the PRC (ibid.).

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<sup>15</sup> If we consider employment by major economic sector, in 2001 'wholesale and import/export' employed 579 300 persons, 'F.I.R.E. and business services', 437 300, and (specifically) financial institutions employed 136 300.

The academic subjects selected by my participants reflect a particular set of instrumental concerns, closely attuned to these wider economic changes.<sup>16</sup> Resonating with Bourdieu's (1996) insights,<sup>17</sup> they have tended towards 'practical' rather than 'intellectual' subjects, oriented towards a particular career path and reflecting the intention to return to East Asia. The following quotation from Rees, an investment banker in a multinational financial institution in Hong Kong, addresses these concerns:

*JW: Why is it so much easier in the present climate to find a job in Hong Kong?*

**Rees: I think it is the subjects you take. If you take finance, accounting, engineering, there's nothing in Vancouver. A lot of it goes on in Hong Kong or in Toronto [...] And if you look at it globally, the subjects that Chinese people take, they are very mobile. It's not like if you are taking forestry that can only exist in Vancouver then you are constrained to Vancouver. If you don't want to work in Hong Kong if you are good enough then you can probably work in Toronto, New York, London...I think they go for big industries. And they don't look at big industries in Vancouver; they look at big industries globally.**

Rees captures the 'decontextualized' nature of the skills required by large multinational companies in Hong Kong (Hannerz 1996). Reflecting a common trait amongst participants, academic subjects were selected for the perceived value of their cultural capital in the labour market. This tendency contrasts, another interviewee has noted, with the attitudes and tendencies of his 'Caucasian' friends.

**Paul: Umm...I think, well, to most of my Hong Kong friends, they'll be all, like, studying science, doctor, business...Actually I don't think that's what they want to take. I don't think that's what they're into, 'cause I talk to lots of my friends, 'I take it because my parents want me to take it.' Like, they'll probably get a good job but, it's not what they want to do so...So...but most of my Caucasian**

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<sup>16</sup> See the Introduction to Section Two for a breakdown of alumni education/career choices. Sweeting (1992) has noted how Hong Kong parents have tended to 'prize education for what it is instrumental in achieving' (p. 68).

<sup>17</sup> He discussed the educational trajectories of the children of business bourgeoisie.

**friends, they do what they want so...I think that's the difference between them.  
Different attitude. (Vancouver, October 1999)**

The Asian financial crisis that began in 1997 and deepened into 1998 has had an impact on the financial service industry in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and throughout Pacific Asia. Banks, in particular, were forced to restructure through 'downsizing' and consequent unemployment. Reviewing these circumstances three years on, Beaverstock and Doel (2001) have surmised that non-Asian banks fared better than might have been expected, recovering the ground lost by 2000, and in fact emerging more powerful than before, buoyed by the strength of the European and North American economies. Yet more recent figures for Hong Kong tell a slightly less optimistic story. Diminishing opportunities, underemployment and unemployment in the key service sectors continue to be perceptible. Vacancies in FIRE and business services decreased by 41 percent, and have dropped from 13,400 in 1997 to 5,300 in 2001. Overall unemployment in Hong Kong increased between 2000 and 2001; in FIRE and business services unemployment rose from 2.3 percent in 2000 to 3.9 percent in 2001.<sup>18</sup> And amidst this corporate downsizing, the number of hours worked also increased; between 2000 and 2001 the number of people working for 50 or more hours per week rose from 34 percent to 35 percent. For those working 60 hours or more, figures increased from 19 percent to 21 percent. The median hours worked for this period were 48 per week (Government of Hong Kong 2002). As I will show, these general statistics are reflected in the recent experiences of returnee graduates working in Hong Kong's financial district. In addition to working extremely long hours with no overtime pay, they perceive it imperative to

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<sup>18</sup> These figures are for the fourth economic quarter in both cases.

constantly maintain and 'upgrade' their cultural capital through further education and training.

It is in this general context of employment uncertainty and insecurity that the pressure and expectations of my participants are more readily apprehended. Solidly middle-class, they *need* qualifications to succeed in this environment. Unlike the subjects of Ong's (1999) study, most could not rely on a successful family business, nor could they rely on inexhaustible money drawn from a family pot. Their success, and the reproduction of middle-class status, is dependent upon the outcome of personal career aspirations (frequently tied to the financial service industry in Hong Kong). The pressure they felt to succeed academically was at least partly a result of the necessity of credentials for the social reproduction of the family. One participant, Benjamin, made a useful distinction along these lines, between the children of highly successful business families (specifically those that would be expected to take over the family business) and people like himself, who have no family business to fall back on. Those in the first category, he told me, would be likely only to achieve a post-secondary or college diploma:

**Benjamin:** Education is a requirement nowadays for everything. For business, for your life [...] You can spot this correlation [between educational achievement and family business] very easily, I can spot it very easily.

*JW:* Would you say there is less pressure on the kids [from successful business families] to do well in school?

**B:** Of course, of course. If I tell you your parents have a million for you, work is not significant. If I tell you that your parents have nothing for you and you have to do it on your own...And that's why I have to go for further study while I can still afford it. I am saving, I am saving, planning for my time, planning for my salary replacement, [wondering] 'can I get any income from anywhere else?'

On this issue, Bourdieu (1996) has written:

‘Different structures of inclinations to invest or, if you will, different *preference systems* or systems of interests are imposed upon agents, primarily through *the structure of the differential chances for profit* that investments are objectively offered by the different social markets [...] The ‘interest’ that an agent (or class of agents) brings to her ‘studies’ (which, along with inherited cultural capital, on which it partially depends, is one of the most powerful factors of academic success) depends not only on her current or anticipated academic success (by anticipated is meant her chances of success given her cultural capital), but also on the degree to which her social success depends upon her academic success.’ (p. 276)

For most of my participants, ‘social success’ was dependent upon ‘academic success’. In contrast, when the head of the family is in the position to pass on a strong business

‘they have no use for an institution like the school, which only grants its certificates of competence claiming universal validity in exchange for guarantees of ability that also claim to be universal [...] For the heads of family business, the nontransferable right of succession provided by the school is merely a last resort, which they attempt to secure either when their business is threatened or when it can no longer provide jobs for all the members of the family [...] we note that academic capital, which tends to increase as ties with the [business] founder weaken, constitutes the nearly obligatory precondition for those with no such ties.’ (p. 284) <sup>19</sup>

Amongst my participants, several family businesses have fallen victim to the recent economic downturn in Hong Kong. Some have folded, and some are expected to do so in the near future. Parents have generally encouraged children to pursue an independent career. Several participants were not entitled to the family business (it was passed to an

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<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu (1996) has much to say on the relative importance of credentials for families differentially placed vis-à-vis business interests. He writes: ‘In [...] large bureaucratic companies, the academic title ceases to be a statutory attribute [...] and becomes instead a genuine *entry pass*: the school – in the guise of the *grande école* – and the corps, a social group that the school produces apparently *ex nihilo* [...] take the place of the family and family ties, with the cooptation of class mates based on school and corps solidarity taking over the role played by nepotism and marital ties in businesses that have the privilege of the transfer of privileges’. From his own sample, he observed that ‘the proportion of higher education graduates among the heads of top industrial, commercial, and banking institutions increases markedly when we go from family-controlled companies [...] to technocratic companies [...] or nationalized companies. Only 3 percent of the chief executives of family-controlled companies report two or more higher education diplomas, compared to [...] 73 percent of the chief executives of technocratically controlled companies.’ (p. 285)

older sibling or a cousin), and some made the decision to pursue their own career regardless. In all cases, educational credentials were perceived as crucial.

### **The cultural (migration) milieu**

It is impossible to comprehend the transnational strategies described in this thesis without an appreciation of the 'migration culture' that permeates Hong Kong society. When occupied by the British in 1841, the population of the territory is widely estimated to have been only a few thousand. Within four years, and as a result of Chinese immigration, these numbers had reached almost 24, 000. At the 1991 census, nearly 40 percent of the population had been born outside Hong Kong. As Skeldon (1994) has written: 'Hong Kong is very much the product of migration and may therefore have a substantial population that has only superficial roots in the territory' (p. 22). 'Hong Kong, almost from its inception, has been oriented overseas' (ibid. p. 24). Sweeting (1992) has argued that the 'transitory' nature of the region is a key factor in the development of education in Hong Kong. He writes, 'Transitization has increased the importance of the certification aspects of education [...] this has meant that educational qualifications have been valued as types of passports or, at least, emigration credit points' (p. 66). The population of Hong Kong, he argues, has always perceived the territory 'either as a stepping-stone on their way to some other place or as a place of temporary refuge' (p. 66). The stories of my participants attest to these claims. Nearly all had at least one grandparent born in Mainland China who then migrated to Hong Kong and most had two or three; migration, it transpired, was a central feature of all participants' family histories.

From the late 1960s onwards, a 'new' pattern of Chinese emigration from Hong Kong began in earnest, responding to liberal changes in the immigration policies of several

countries, including the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The majority of my participants have extended family members involved in this early stage of emigration, currently residing in one or more of these countries, and creating a precedent for family mobility. Several participants had extended family living in Canada who had preceded their own immigration.

For Vancouver, specifically, a recent history of Chinese immigration has established important circuits of economic, social and emotional transnationalism (Ley and Kobayashi 2002, Hiebert and Ley 2003).<sup>20</sup> Contemporary patterns contrast starkly with traditional immigration; until the 1960s immigration from Europe dominated the demographic profile of Vancouver (and Canada more generally). In 1921, 80 percent of Vancouver's 163, 000 population claimed "British origin" (Ley 1995). A crucial change occurred in 1967 when, in addition to family reunification, a 'point system' was introduced, transforming the procedure by which immigrants were selected. Henceforth, applications for immigration were evaluated on the basis of specific skills, ostensibly aligned to national economic needs. They were judged on a range of expedient criteria, such as age, level of education, occupational status, family members in Canada, and language ability (Smart 1994). The new policy signified an end to one type of discrimination and the initiation of another. Country of origin was no longer important – immigrants were now predominantly selected on the basis of their wealth and human capital. Consequently, a historically significant change in the major source region of immigration to Canada occurred – from Europe to Asia. Until recently, Hong Kong and Taiwan have been particularly important players in these trends.

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<sup>20</sup> As I will argue in later chapters, these circuits are the foundation for the social capital (or networks) associated with 'overseas' credential recognition.



Since the 1970s, Canada has increasingly directed its policy towards capturing the wealth of migrants, through 'economic' class immigration. In 1978, an entrepreneur category was introduced under the Business Immigration Programme, and subsequently modified in 1986 to include a second investor category.<sup>21</sup> Together, the skilled and the business migrants fall within 'economic-class' immigration according to official classification.<sup>22</sup> The importance of economic-class immigration during the 1990s is related directly to the influx of Hong Kong students into Vancouver schools at this time.

The political strategy (by all three levels of government) to attract Hong Kong's "new rich" to Vancouver ostensibly worked. Statistics indicate that a significant number of immigrants from East Asia – in the business but also skilled categories – landed in Vancouver in the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> Of the total number of immigrants to Vancouver in 1995 (38, 864)<sup>24</sup> Hong Kong and Taiwan accounted for 29.9 percent and 13.6 percent, respectively – constituting the top two highest source areas by number (see figure 6.2).

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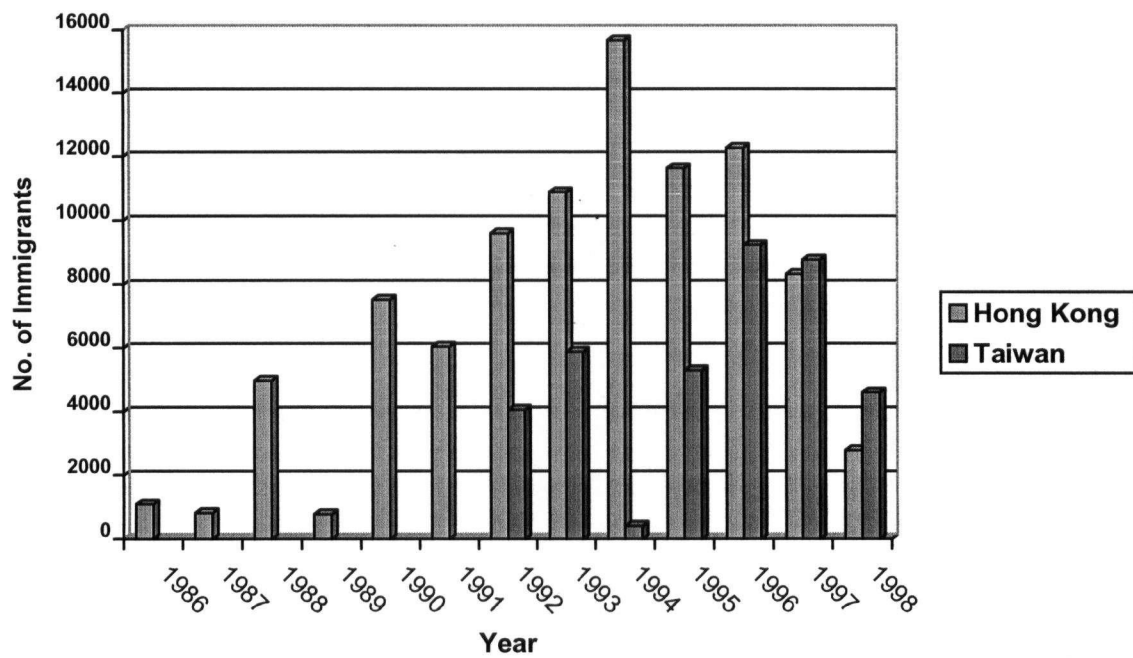
<sup>21</sup> To give an indication of the economic desirability of immigrants under the Business Migration Programme, since implementation in 1986 over \$4.22 billion has been invested through the investor category alone (according to amounts specified on applications) by 16, 417 investors participating (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2000).

<sup>22</sup> The 'economic class' of immigration under current Canadian policy constitutes the sub-classes of: 'assisted relatives', 'other independents', 'entrepreneurs', 'self employment' and 'investor'. The latter three categories fall under the Business Immigration Programme.

<sup>23</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided the data used here (including data in charts). It should be noted that although business class immigration led figures in the early 1990s, in the later 1990s this was overtaken by skilled migration. From 1995 to 1997, skilled migration to B.C. increased annually from 11, 670 in 1995 to 16, 435 in 1996, to 18, 171 in 1997. This latter class has a larger proportion from Taiwan than Hong Kong, and this difference is significant.

<sup>24</sup> This date was selected to indicate the time around which many participants entered Canada.

**Figure 6.2: Immigration to Vancouver by Source Area,  
1986 - 1998**



Source of Data: Citizenship and Immigration Canada 1999

Vancouver received around 98 percent of Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants to British Columbia during the 1968 – 98 period, and combined they represented over 71 per cent of economic-class immigration.<sup>25</sup> Through these policies, Vancouver has become enmeshed in a transnational, transpacific ‘social field’ (Basch et al. 1994) comprising economic, social and emotional ties that may endure for years to come. The implications of this for both (trans)localities are only beginning to emerge (Ley and Kobayashi 2002). With regards to this thesis, these geographically specific circuits are the foundation for the cultural capital acquired by immigrant students in Vancouver, and the means by which their cultural capital is given *particular* recognition and value in Hong Kong.

### **The social (English) milieu**

The third, significant external influence on transnational educational strategies has to be the status of English in Hong Kong. The colonial heritage is clearly crucial in securing the eminent position of the English language (and English-medium education) in the minds of the general populace (Postiglione 1992, Sweeting 1992). During the early stages of colonisation, the emergence of a local elite was tied to trade and the need for ‘middle-men’ (‘compradors’), educated in exclusive English-language schools (Sweeting 1992). The University of Hong Kong emerged as an English institution (Postiglione 1992). Parents have consistently resisted attempts by government to promote Chinese-language education, drawing the links between English-medium education and elite social status (ibid.). On this point, Postiglione (1992) has written:

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<sup>25</sup> During 2000 and 2001 immigration from Hong Kong to Canada in general and Vancouver specifically, has very much abated. Correspondingly, the majority of my participants entered Canada in the mid to late 1990s.

The medium of instruction in most secondary schools in Hong Kong is still officially English, which places a tremendous burden on students since most have little contact with native English speakers. The effects of this practice on culture and identity is of more interest to researchers than parents, most of whom continue to opt for as much English-medium education for their children as possible. Children who attend English-medium schools are at an advantage, because they will be recruited to government civil service posts [...] There also seems to be an element of safeguarding privilege by an elite whose children are more or less bilingual. (p. 22)

Very contemporary government policy reflects a continuation of the tendency to privilege the English language, perceiving English as crucial to maintaining a competitive work force in a global economy. The 'Hong Kong Government Information' web site had the following to say about language in the territory:

Students in Hong Kong face a unique language environment. Our community is essentially Chinese. We speak, read and write Chinese in our daily life. Hong Kong is an international business, financial and trading centre. To maintain a high standard of English is crucial to our economic competitiveness. The Government's language policy is to enable our students to be biliterate (i.e. be conversant with written Chinese and English) and trilingual (i.e. speak fluent English, Cantonese and Putonghua). (Hong Kong Government Information, 2002)

The government set up a Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) in 1996, and the 'Work-Place English' campaign is one of the most significant developments to have emerged out of this. The campaign was launched in 2000 and has involved the official recognition of 'Workplace English Benchmarks' for six job types. Government subsidies are provided to 'encourage employees to attend training courses and attain the relevant benchmarks' (ibid.).

The campaign has attempted to reach the whole of Hong Kong society. There was a launching ceremony, attended by representatives 'from the business sector, international chambers of commerce, trade associations and labour bodies' (SCOLAR 2000). There

were radio and TV programmes ‘built around the importance of work-place English’, newspaper supplements in both the English and Chinese media, a website, a TV announcement, advertising on public transport, and ‘a series of roving exhibitions’ (ibid.). A table published by SCOLAR indicates the various ‘benchmarks’ assigned to different job types, based on a pilot test conducted in 2000 with 268 companies. An amended version is given below in table 6.1.

**Table 6.1: Workplace English Benchmarks**

<b>Hong Kong Workplace English Minimum Benchmark</b>	<b>Spoken English</b>	<b>Written English</b>
Clerks	Mid	High
Executives/Associate professionals	High	High
Frontline service personnel	Mid	Low
Receptionists	High	Low
Secretaries	Low	Low

Source: SCOLAR 2000

Interestingly, the benchmark levels 'are aligned to the business English tests administered by several internationally-recognized examination bodies...' The government suggests that employers may wish to adopt these benchmarks in recruiting new staff, i.e., make them sit one of the standard English tests. Early in 2003, the deputy Chairman of Sun Hung Kai Properties (the biggest employer in Hong Kong) implemented the use of the IELTS to measure the English level of his staff.<sup>26</sup> The colonial legacy is alive and well in Hong Kong, and perhaps more important for aspiring young people than ever before. The attraction of an overseas (English) education is clear.

### **Middle-class sanctuaries: international schools**

'International schools in Hong Kong have changed a lot in the past 20 years' writes Whitehead (2002b). 'From catering almost exclusively to Western expatriates, the bulk of the students are now Hong Kongers. And this localisation has been matched by a broadening in the scope and number of the schools.' 'Some international schools are almost entirely local, such as the Canadian International School, which is made up of 98 per cent Chinese students, most of whom are returnees.' There are 94 international schools in Hong Kong, as outlined in a recently published 'directory' (Whitehead 2002).

The sudden increased presence, and changing nature of international schools in Hong Kong can be interpreted, I suggest, in two ways. On the one hand, international schools

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<sup>26</sup> This sparked a lively debate on the letters page of the *South China Morning Post* about the suitability of various international testing systems for different job types. Whilst the SCOLAR action plan, published in January 2003, recommended the use of IELTS, one letter in particular argues that the IELTS is not suitable for companies because it is a university entrance test. For companies seeking to test the English levels of their staff, the Business Language Testing Service (BULATS) (a product of the University of Cambridge) should be used. IELTS, the letter argued, is much more expensive to sit (HK\$1,100 compared to HK\$350 for the BULATS); preparation for IELTS costs up to \$3000, whilst for the BULATS it costs nothing. IELTS can only be given at fixed times, BULATS can be sat at any time approved by Cambridge University (Letter from Peter Forsythe, Chairman Hong Kong Federation of Private Educators, *SCMP* Mon Feb 24 2003, p. 14).

are a manifestation of middle-class attempts to shelter its children from the effects of extreme competition, exemplifying the 'sanctuary' schools discussed by Bourdieu (1996). On the other hand, they can prepare children for future transnational mobility, offering both a cultural education and a very specific foreign curriculum. Students who attend a Canadian international school are more likely to be subsequently accepted at a Canadian university (*Interview, BC Provincial Govt. Victoria 2003*).

Of my Hong Kong participants, Olivia was the only one to have children of her own and to have faced, first hand, the education-related dilemmas of parenting. She graduated from UBC and moved back to Hong Kong when her husband received an attractive job offer. Her son is in international school in Hong Kong. She explains the reasoning behind the (expensive) decision to place her son in a British international school:

*JW: do you have any thoughts about ever going back with your children to Canada?*

**Olivia: eventually I see them somewhere else, not Hong Kong. Not necessarily Canada, but somewhere else. Even if they could make it into University of Hong Kong, I would prefer it for them to go somewhere else.**

*JW: Can you explain that?*

**O: Yeah, it's just a personal choice. It's my choice and my husband's choice that we *don't* like the education here, the education system. A lot of people like that, but we don't. 'Cause we have both been educated overseas. I can't say for sure what it's like in the States or Australia or wherever. But I'm quite sure there's a similarity amongst all the other countries. There must be a similarity compared to Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a very unique place. Unique in the sense that it's tough, it's very academic, no freedom, very competitive. It's just not the type of thing you want for your children. You want them to enjoy going to school. Because my husband and I, we have had a few years of schooling here and a few years of schooling there. And so we have been through it ourselves. [...] I didn't like it here when I was here. I hated school here. I wasn't very good in school, I mean, I *made* it but I wasn't very good. Same with him. So even if I didn't make it and did really great I wouldn't have enjoyed it. That's why we want our son in international school.**

*JW: Explain about international school.*

**O:** When he [her son] turned two [years old] people started asking me, 'have you got him applications for school?' - for elementary school. When he was like two, three! I said 'I never thought of it', it never crossed my mind. Anyhow, this is the idea. Parents from Hong Kong are very *very* concerned about where their kids go to school. In Vancouver you go to the public elementary school, where you stay [live]. But then in Hong Kong it's like the 'band one' school. I had no idea what that was. This is a new thing that was not around when I was here. Band one is the most preferred choice. And I don't know *how* you get in. I don't know how. I still don't know the local school system. [So] when my son was about to enter kindergarten I had a big decision about whether he was going to go to mainstream school or international school. So I did a bit of research, as to how much the schools cost. I asked around.

There is a strong sense in which the international school serves as a protective enclave against the competitive pressures, and the possibility of failure, attached to public school in Hong Kong. Consequently it can be perceived as an easier (less rigorous) option – an opinion voiced by Olivia's mother:

**O:** My mother was the person against international school. Because she thought that only those kids who can't make it to mainstream they go to the international, because it's very linear, very relaxed and very easy. But my husband, as the head of the household, he said no, there's no way we are going to put him in mainstream. He's not going to like it and we are going to have to spend a lot of time with him if he's in a public school, helping him with his school work, otherwise if he can't make good grades he has to...I don't know what would happen in the local school. Anyway, he said it must be international school, there's no other choice, so I researched [...] Canadian International was one of the places that I was interested in because they follow the Canadian public school curriculum. But he didn't end up there because of the tuition fees. It's very, very expensive.

*JW: Where did your son end up going?*

**O:** English school [...] Actually the English School Foundation is the very first international school in Hong Kong. It is the British school. When I was living here years ago you must be British, you must be the children of British government officials' kids. It was really for Britain, and they would assign the school in our catchment area.



As noted above, the system has changed quite drastically in recent years, to cater for *local* (middle-class) demand:

**O:** The one he goes to is called Kennedy School. He went through some interviews and got into year one elementary. They just wanted to have a talk with him and see what his English skills were like. And then he made it and he can just move on straight to their high school, which is in the same catchment area.

*JW:* So that removes a lot of stress.

**O:** Oh yes. I mean, once he gets in, chances are he will get in, unless the child speaks no English at all. The things they look for is that the child is quite fluent in English.

*JW:* How much do you pay?

**O:** HK\$70, 000 in a year. I divide that by ten. It's about the same as private school in Vancouver would have cost.<sup>27</sup>

The fees for these schools are not inconsequential – entry, it would seem, is based almost entirely on parents' ability to pay. The cost of international schooling has prevented Olivia's second, younger child from following in the footsteps of her first. She has calculated that it will be cheaper for her to move back to Canada with the two children (leaving her husband to work in Hong Kong), and to then place them in a Canadian public school, than for her to fund her second child through international school. This, in fact, is her plan, exemplifying the transnational family strategies so commonplace amongst Hong Kong's middle class emigrants.

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<sup>27</sup> HK\$70, 000 is approximately CA\$17, 000.

Printed in the *South China Morning Post*, Li (1999) provides a breakdown of cost of international schooling in Hong Kong and gives some insight into the privileges they bestow.

‘The primary section of the Chinese International School caters to children aged four to ten [...] Fees for the reception class in 1999-2000 were \$58,700 [...] The school fees for students in Years One to Six were \$72,900, with an additional \$3,780 to \$4,250 for other expenses.’<sup>28</sup>

At Shatin Junior School, which is under the English Schools Foundation, fees were \$45,100. The curriculum is based on that of the British system, but slight moderations have been made to tailor to the needs of local students.

At the Chinese International School on Braemar Hill, tuition fees in the secondary section in the same year were \$87,000. An additional \$2,030 to \$6,910 is charged to cover books, teaching aids, outings and stationery, bringing the total to between \$89,030 and \$93,910. Terri Shia, development director of the school, said facilities include a 25-metre swimming pool, a tennis court, and roof-top playing areas. Students are taught Putonghua in their Chinese classes.

Students at the French International School can choose to belong to either the French or the international stream, depending on their language abilities. Classes are conducted in French in the former and English in the latter. In the French stream, fees in the 1999-2000 academic year were \$58,857 in the first cycle, and \$72,357 in the second. In the international stream, fees for secondary students in Forms I to V were \$82,449, but for students preparing for the International Baccalaureate they were \$103,476.

At Hong Kong International School, tuition fees were \$107,900 for students in the middle school (grades six to eight), and \$120,200 for those in grades 9 to 11 of the high school. In grade 12 fees were \$120,750. Students in all grades have to pay an additional education fee of \$2,200. The school follows the American curriculum. There is a library, a cafeteria, and an indoor gymnasium in each of the middle and high school divisions. An indoor pool, a football pitch, and two tennis courts are also available.

South Island School charged \$74,900 for each secondary school student in the year 1999-2000. The curriculum follows that of the English system, where students have to sit for GCSE and GCE A-level exams. An indoor sports centre, a swimming pool, a football pitch and a basketball court are provided for the students.’

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<sup>28</sup> HK\$1 = CA\$0.23 (approx.).

These schools offer sanctuary and an important cultural experience for the children of Hong Kong's more privileged families. As Ong (1999) has noted with such insight, they seek acculturation into a different, cosmopolitan set of social norms, marking aspirations lying beyond Hong Kong.<sup>29</sup>

But, as Bourdieu (1996) observed for the French sanctuary schools, Hong Kong's international schools also serve as a means for the privileged classes to *avoid failure* in the local system. His observations on the democratisation of education in France, and the impact on the middle-class, provide a striking counterpart to this discussion. In an example of a recently opened institute of management, he writes:

[The school] 'provides a second chance, as it were, to students who have not received from the academic world the recognition they had been anticipating (a large proportion of whom are from the business bourgeoisie) [...] There is no doubt that a school such as this one, endowed with all the external trappings of modernity – starting with the international character of its faculty and its student body – is perfectly designed to provide an honourable substitute for the most prestigious diplomas.' (p. 217)

One Canadian institution openly acknowledges the fear of failure present amongst middle-class families in Hong Kong, and the means by which it can serve as an 'honourable substitute' to the best local schools, removing students from the highly demanding system:

'The Delia School of Canada offers an alternative study path after the HKCEE, allowing graduates to apply to foreign universities [...] Students who do not succeed

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<sup>29</sup> In contrast to Ong's (1999) findings, my research points to apparently contradictory processes of mobility and localisation. On the one hand, participants invariably appeared footloose, reflected in their spatially dispersed extended family and their own experiences of relative mobility. On the other, the various decisions they make are geared towards a working future based in Hong Kong, and sometimes extended to China. Rarely did they perceive mobility as a long-term strategy. Their decisions are embedded in the peculiarly geographical transnational circuits between Vancouver and Hong Kong.

in the HKCEE may find themselves at a crossroads. Too young to know what they want to do, yet challenged to prove their abilities in Hong Kong's rigid education system, one option may be to explore further studies overseas' (Oliver 2001, *SCMP*).

The school's Principal was quoted as saying:

'Those who may not be doing so well under the Hong Kong system will be able to go straight into the last year of the high school programme [...] If they do well in these courses, universities in Canada will accept them...'

'When assessing overseas applicants, Canadian universities judge students only on how they perform in the relevant matriculation course work. This means that Hong Kong students who have not performed well in their early years stand a reasonable chance of gaining entrance to a top school if they work hard.' (ibid.).

The social exclusionary implications of these 'alternative paths' are clear: the school charges HK\$64, 000 for one academic year (c. CA\$14, 000).

### **Middle-class *habitus*: a 'universe of possibilities' <sup>30</sup>?**

I now turn to examine the importance of particular attitudes, aspirations and expectations about education developed within the family unit and captured through Bourdieu's (1984) notion of the 'habitus'. This chapter has so far been primarily concerned with explicating the external context in which various choices about education and mobility have been exercised. In what remains, I consider the 'internal' structural dynamics of choice, imagination, drive and ambition. I ask how it was that my participants and their parents came to *imagine* the possibility of an overseas education (Appadurai 1996), and conceived migration as a means to this end. I begin by suggesting the importance of family histories, incorporating stories of mobility and success, in constituting the *habitus*.

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<sup>30</sup> This is taken from a quotation from Bourdieu (1984).

I asked my participants to describe the most important aspects of their family histories, as they understood them, and migration featured centrally in the vast majority of accounts. As has been well documented in the literature, contemporary Hong Kong and Taiwan, along with other East and Southeast Asian countries, have been substantially fashioned through immigration from China (see Wang 2000 for a useful account of the Chinese diaspora). Most of my participants relayed personal stories of emigration, originating in China with their grandparents and extended family. Migration was conceived as a *strategy* employed for survival, and Hong Kong and Taiwan, as Sweeting (1992) notes, places of refuge.

Steve's grandfather was a soldier and a pilot with the Kuomintang, forced to escape to Taiwan in 1949. He was relatively wealthy at that time – a landowner – and lost it all when he emigrated. Steve is aware that the property in China exists to this day 'but now they don't count it because we don't have the paper to prove that that property is ours...' Cause when they took over China everything was just gone and we won't have the chance to get it back.' Hardship and loss figured strongly in their accounts. Ryan here relays what he knows of his grandparents' pasts:

**Ryan: They were both born in China. I think they came to Hong Kong when they were just one year old or two...I think I remember that before the civil war my grandfather was rich. He had, like, seven servants. But because the communist party took over all the possessions, they had to start over in Hong Kong. They were poor.**

As a consequence of 'starting from scratch', his father's life was difficult at first:

**R: They had to share the washroom, the kitchen...They had six people in the family in a room this big [gestures].**

His father had a central part to play in transforming the family circumstances, dropping out of school early and working to support the household. All the siblings but one was forced to leave school to work. Ryan said: 'Only my fourth uncle was able to study and go to university. Because he was younger.' These stories made the subsequent success of the family all the more palpable. For the majority of my participants, grandparents established small businesses soon after emigration, and built them up over time so that presently, all of my participants could claim a 'comfortable' home life.

Charlie's grandparents came from China. His grandfather on his father's side was a government official, forced to escape the communist regime by migrating to Hong Kong. He and his wife had 10 children in all; they brought only 8 from China. Charlie is not quite sure why. They were cheated out of money in Hong Kong and then moved to Taiwan. His father received assistance from "an organisation that helps poor people, for children. They [his grandparents] had too many children. They didn't have enough food. Sometimes they didn't eat for the whole day". His grandfather found work in a secondary school and his grandmother in a factory. His father's elder sisters found work also, supporting the younger children, including Charlie's father, so that they could go to school. His father went on to university, setting a precedent for the present generation to follow.

Barry's parents were both born in China. His mother went to Hong Kong when she was very young. His father left China when he was about 16 years old, to escape poverty. Barry said: "my dad's side was pretty poor and there was, like, nothing to eat and then...That's why he had to go illegally to Hong Kong." There was one distant relative there to help him. He sent remittances back to his family in China: "my dad said he never

thought he would move again, after he moved from China to Hong Kong. But then he has to come here too...for us.” I present these stories to demonstrate one aspect of the development of a habitus in which migration and educational achievement can exist as unquestionable possibilities for the present generation. Migration is perceived, as one participant phrased it, as ‘a way to solve a problem’ (Paul, 1999), and has a revered precedent in family history.

Just as migration has a strong presence in family biographies, so too does education. Just under half of my participants have parents with a university degree (an unusual achievement at that time <sup>31</sup>). More surprisingly, perhaps, a few have parents, uncles and aunts who were educated *overseas*. Emma’s uncle graduated from the University of Alberta. David’s mother went to the University of Oregon. In an interview with her, I asked her to speak to the educational experiences of her family:

**Penny:** My father had a small business – a factory, a chemical factory. And he saved every bit of money so that we could have a good education. And we all had some scholarship from government as well as [from the] university in the States, so we [...] saved enough for the airplane so we went to the States.

*JW: You and your siblings as well?*

**P:** Yes, yes. So my first brother got sick so he never went abroad. My second older brother went through Stanford University, he had his PhD there, and I went to the University of Oregon for my Master’s degree, and my younger sister, she had her PhD from the psychology department at the University of Wisconsin. She is the full professor here in Indiana University. So they...and I had a cousin, he had a PhD from Kent University, in England! He is teaching, he is a professor in Singapore.

*JW: Your family are high flyers....*

**P:** Well I guess that’s the way it is. My parents suffered the communists, they suffered during the Sino-Japanese war, and they suffered all that trouble, and

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<sup>31</sup> In 1979, only 9,315 persons in the whole of Hong Kong were attending university (Shrive 1992).

so they saved up all the money, every penny, in order for us to have a better education.

*JW: Is that quite common?*

**P:** Yes, yes, very, very common. We value education so much. Some parents think that making money is important, but for the older generation they value education first. [...] But actually my mother didn't have much of an education, but she saved so much money so that my sister and I went to the States. That's not easy. It's very expensive to buy airplane tickets to fly to the United States. She saved every thing for us, just because she said, you like to study, study's good.

Penny's description exemplifies what Bourdieu would call family cultural capital and what Coleman (1988) was referring to when he explicated the role of 'social capital' in the academic success of children. These are the resources that families bring to bear (sometimes unconsciously) upon their child's education, facilitating success through a particular kind of socialisation. Not unconnected to this is the weight of family expectation, the necessity of living up to standards already set, as Alison here explains:

*JW: Do your parents discuss their hopes for you?*

**Alison:** My dad wants me to go on with my study and take a Master's and a PhD like you! *Laughs.* I'm not good enough, I *know* [...] Even if I go further study I may want to go back to Hong Kong and take law.

*JW: Is that your dad's influence?*

**A:** Kind of [...] Because my whole family, well my brother and I have a lot of pressure, because my dad is a lawyer, my uncle in Australia is a lawyer, and my aunt, my dad's sister is a doctor and her husband is a doctor as well. The whole family is professional so that's why my dad puts a lot of hopes in us. But I don't know. I don't really want to be a professional.

The weight of past family successes should not be discounted as a force in the construction of present goals and objectives.



## ***Habitus and Education***

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) distinguishes between the 'class habitus' of different social groups through an identification of their variable cultural 'tastes'. He writes:

'The principle of the most important differences in the order of life-style and, even more, of the 'stylization of life' lies in the variations in objective and subjective distance from the world, with its material constraints and temporal urgencies' (p. 376).

Working-class people, he argues, have the least 'distance from the world' and face the greatest 'material constraints' and 'temporal urgencies'. He found that they refuse 'art for art's sake', and will extend this principle to daily existence 'and an art of living which rejects specifically aesthetic intentions as aberrations' (p. 376).

'Perhaps the most ruthless call to order, which in itself no doubt explains the extraordinary realism of the working classes, stems from the closure effect of the homogeneity of the directly experienced social world. There is no other possible language, no other lifestyle, no other form of kinship relation; the universe of possibilities is closed.' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 381)

In this thesis, I am concerned with defining 'the universe of possibilities' as conceived by my participants in their daily lives. Ostensibly, these middle-class families exercise greater choice than their working-class, 'localised' counterparts. They are relatively liberated from the material and social constraints that would otherwise curtail their ability to migrate. Transnational movement has exposed them to different lifestyles, and many possibilities. Their mobility implies, at least at first glance, a high degree of freedom. And yet, Bourdieu's portrayal of the middle-class experience as antithetical to that of the working-class overlooks a similar construction of choice and possibility. My participants

were clearly constrained by the 'family regime' (Ong 1999) into which they have been born. Their paths have been, and continue to be dictated by their parents; the language of 'success' is non-negotiable. They all have very similar stories of social pressure, parental expectations, educational choices, and an absence of social life beyond the strategic accumulation of cultural capital. No other path, I suggest, was in fact open to them; they could not conceive of a different way of being. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss participants' experiences of schooling in Hong Kong from the perspective of their class habitus, suggesting the ways in which this has shaped particular social outcomes.

James Coleman (1988), in a seminal article, describes the effects of 'social capital' on the academic achievement of children in the US, and the role of the family – specifically what he calls 'family background' – is presumed central. He separates family background into three different components, each with an important influence on educational achievement of children within the family – 'financial capital', 'human capital' and 'social capital'. Financial capital is simply family income or wealth. Human capital refers to the parents' education, and the potential for a 'cognitive environment for the child that aids learning' (p 16). Social capital refers to the time and effort that parents invest in their child's intellectual development. Coleman gives the example of one public school in the US where 'Asian parents were observed to buy two copies of each textbook. It transpired that one copy was for the mother. In the case of my participants, all three elements of 'family background', deemed necessary for academic success, are evident.

In researching what Coleman conceives as 'social capital' and what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have called 'cultural capital', Lareau (1987) examined the relationship between 'social class' and 'parental involvement in school' through what she describes as

‘an intensive study of home-school relationships of children in the first and second grades of a white working-class school and an upper-middle-class school’ in the US (p. 704).<sup>32</sup>

‘These results suggest that social class position and class culture become a form of cultural capital in the school setting (...Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Although working-class and middle-class parents share a desire for their children’s educational success...social location leads them to construct different pathways for realizing that success’ (p. 714).

Working-class parents, she found, rely much more heavily on the teacher to educate their children, whereas middle-class parents spend significant time ‘supervising, monitoring, and overseeing the educational experience of their children’ (ibid.). ‘Generally, the evidence demonstrates that the level of parental involvement is linked to the class position of the parents and to the social and cultural resources that social class yields in American society’ (Lareau 1987, p. 712)<sup>33</sup>

Ball et al. (1995) argue that working-class parents are less able to invest in the potentially long-term rewards, such as schooling, because of more immediate concerns, such as ‘getting by’ on a day-to-day basis. In their study of Greater London, they found that for working-class respondents

‘School has to be ‘fitted’ into a set of constraints and expectations related to work roles, family roles, the sexual division of labour and the demands of household organisation [...] For our middle-class respondents it was much more common to find family roles and household organisation being accommodated to school’ (p. 57).

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<sup>32</sup> Class is defined in terms of parental occupations.

<sup>33</sup> Postiglione (1997) has discussed, in the context of Hong Kong, the research pointing to the links between family socio-economic status (SES) and children’s achievement in school. ‘There have been few comprehensive studies of family background and school achievement in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, evidence gathered since the 1960s shows the persistent influence of family background on educational achievement (scores in examinations) and educational attainment (number of years attained in the educational system) (p. 146).

As the following interview extracts suggest, for my participants, family roles and household organisation were accommodated completely to school. The material resources provided by participants' parents created a 'learning environment' (as described by Coleman 1988). Tutoring was very common prior to emigration. In addition, there was an overwhelming stress on extra curricula activities, which can be explained as a strategic form of investment, characteristic of the contemporary middle-class, described here by Brown (1995):

'Within the middle classes, the development of the 'charismatic' qualities of their children is becoming as important as arming them with the necessary credentials, contacts and networks. There is nothing new about this focus on the 'rounded' person, but whereas a range of broader interests and hobbies which offered time-out for academic study was seen as a form of cultural consumption which was to be enjoyed for its own sake, it has increasingly become a form of investment as part of the construction of a 'value added' curriculum vitae. This involves an increasing 'commodification' of the socio-emotional embodiment of culture, incorporating drive, ambition, social confidence, tastes and interpersonal skills.' (p. 42)

In the following quotations, immigrant students attending university in Vancouver describe their personal experiences of education in Hong Kong.

**Nelly: I was under a lot of pressure from my parents. I have to go to the tutorial class after school when I was in Kindergarten. And my parents had to put me in those classes 'cause in Hong Kong there is a test or quiz every week, assignments every day [...] And there was not only your school-work but also extra curricular activities. You had to learn piano, swimming, drawing. And so I didn't have much time to spend for myself [...] I really hated those classes.**

Nelly attended extra classes all the way from Kindergarten to Grade Nine. And classes did not end in the summer. She was constantly encouraged to upgrade her cultural capital.

**Nelly: My father said you have to get a university degree in order to find a better job and so he always encouraged us to do better. And every summer we**

**had to join those summer schools, or go to those tutorial classes to learn English, Mandarin, computers and stuff.**

Most participants had tutoring for particular, 'weak' subjects. The tutors would come to their homes after school, several times a week:

**Rosie: Yes, I had a lot of tutors, English, science, math. When I am not [doing] OK I have to have another teacher to help me.**

Without exception, mothers played a central and active role in students' schooling. They would sit, physically next to their children as they did their homework:

**Rosie: My mum studied with me: I'm studying, she's studying. She would ask me to spell the word, do the math. Every night.**

**Hope: My mom actually studied with me. I remembered that. When I had exams she would actually sit next to me and I had to study.**

Sophie gives some indication of the *amount* of homework students faced, and the stress that resulted:

*JW: You were in Grade Six when you left. Can you describe your experience of going to school in Hong Kong?*

**Sophie: In Hong Kong school is very stressful. A lot of homework every day – maybe twelve or thirteen homeworks per day. A lot. And everyday I have to finish my homework by sleep and get to school early morning. Like, it can be very stressful. And we always have tests every week and dictation every week.**

**JW: Did you parents encourage you?**

**S: My mother, like, Umm...she *really* cares about our school work and she always helped me and my brother with school work after [her own] work...Yes, sometime she asked me to check the homework for any mistake.**

The lives of my participants in Hong Kong were thoroughly structured around school and schoolwork.

*JW: Did schoolwork take up a lot of your time?*

**Rosie: Yes, almost all of my time. Because in Hong Kong it was pretty heavy I think.**

The social nature of the competitive stress is apparent in Kevin's description.

**Kevin: Of course they want me to get high grades. And I think everyone, at least my friends, the only thing they think about is the competition within their class or their grade. So I think that's the main goal, just to be the top student.**

*JW: Did you feel that sense of competition?*

**K: Yes, certainly. Everyone feels the same.**

*JW: How did that play out everyday?*

**K: Certainly more pressure. If you want to get high grades you have to study. There's a lot of pressure put on students.**

*JW: Who is putting the pressure on?*

**K: I think the whole system. Everybody is working hard and there is a peer pressure or something like that that pushes you to study too, like, you tell yourself that 'I cannot fall behind. I'm not meeting the standard'.**

His comments imply the uncertainty surrounding the reproduction of social class status amongst the current generation:

**Kevin: They [students] are under tremendous pressure...They have this motivation to climb higher, to go to a higher status in society. I think that even Hong Kong people walk faster. They are uptight every single day.**

I asked Alison to give her thoughts on the Hong Kong education system. She provides a particularly vivid description of her experience of 'cramming' for exams:

**Alison:** Hong Kong's system is a lot more stressful than here [Vancouver]. Like here you can see the people are always very free and [...] you can skip class. But when you're in Hong Kong you never do that. And the atmosphere is more casual [in Vancouver]. I like it. For parents, they don't like the Vancouver system a lot.

*JW: Why?*

**A:** Because...You know kind of Pekinese, Beijing duck? We call it... The Hong Kong system is like a duck filling system. Like they're filling stuff into the duck. Stuff it in. Yes. And then the kids are like, you stuff all the stuff in there and they have to study very hard. And the parents are at the back, like, 'you've got to study very hard. Come on, do your work. Don't go out and play OK? No TV! And then after dinner do your work'... And [during] the holiday, 'come on study'. So it's very stressful. And then they have a lot of ranks. It's like, you are like the first rank, second rank. And then if you are in the lower rank you can't go into a good secondary school.

*JW: So there is a lot of stress when you are very young?*

**A:** Yeah, even [...] for the kids, like, five years old when they get into elementary school. And it's not easy because they have a lot of tests to take. And then they ask them really difficult questions [...] I mean, even adults don't know how to answer!

*JW: Were your parents quite strict with you about your education when you were younger?*

**A:** Yes, yes. My mum was very strict to us. Like when she finished work and then she came back home. After she cooked dinner she would sit next to us and then check our homework and stuff. And then she had a lot of work sheets for us to do. Even in summer time we have to take lots of tutoring and stuff.

The weight of expectations, along with the material, financial and emotional resources invested in the child's education, culminated in tremendous 'stress' and 'pressure'.<sup>34</sup> It is in this light that we can better understand the role of migration in education, as a means of escape and sanctuary, as well as the opportunity to acquire more valuable cultural capital in the form of the highly coveted Western education (Ong 1999).

In this chapter I have attempted to discern key elements of the social context within which migration *for* education has become a relatively common strategy for middle-class families. The concept of *habitus* has provided a useful tool for imagining how this context may help form the choices, and the aspirations preceding those choices, that resulted in emigration and, subsequently, return. In the chapter that follows, I focus on the strategy itself, migration, considering how and why it intersects with education in the accumulation of cultural capital and the consequent reproduction of social class status for middle-class students from East Asia.

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<sup>34</sup> The University of Hong Kong has recently established a Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention and will offer a course on the prevention of suicide (partly taught by faculty from UBC). Suicides in Hong Kong are 4 times the UK rate for people aged between 10 and 20 years (Yeung 2002; Beech 2003).



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **'TRAVEL TO SCHOOL': TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY STRATEGIES AND EDUCATION IN CANADA**

'In Hong Kong and Taiwan [...] youngsters may not be allowed to graduate if their results are poor. Here in Canada, as long as one goes to school, one will sooner or later graduate' (Ke 1998, *Ming Pao Daily News*)

Section Two draws attention to the specific *spatial strategies* enlisted by middle-class families from East Asia as they engage in the accumulation of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986) through migration and education. Here, I want to develop several theoretical premises that have underpinned much of the argument in this thesis and upon which this chapter will draw. In his writing on the education systems of advanced industrial societies, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has maintained that families *perceive* educational opportunities in relation to their prior possession of cultural and other forms of capital. It follows that they are also able to *act upon* those perceptions by drawing on a variety of resources (social, cultural and economic) at their disposal (Ball et al. 1995). The capacity to perceive and act upon educational opportunities varies, it is widely believed, by social class (Bourdieu 1984, 1986, 1996, Ball et al. 1995, Brown 1995, Brown et al. 1997, Gibson and Asthana 1998, Ball 2003), whilst education remains the key mechanism by which class is reproduced in society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979, Bourdieu 1984, 1996, Brown 1995, Brown et al. 1997, Ball 2003). I want to emphasise that the exercise of parental 'choice' in education (so revered by contemporary governments under the

influence of neoliberal ideology and underpinning the drive to rank, measure and standardise 'output') is invariably related to *spatial mobility* (Ball et al. 1995, Butler 2003, Holdsworth 2003). I argue that the internationalisation of education (and associated application of 'economic' principles to educational systems) has fundamentally transformed the geography of parental 'choice', whilst maintaining its social class basis.

This chapter has two principal objectives in relation to these general theoretical claims. First, it explores the *perception* of the spatial distribution of educational opportunities at different scales through a detailed empirical study of 50 middle-class students from East Asia undergoing higher education in Vancouver.<sup>1</sup> Second, I consider more directly the various *spatial strategies* employed by these students and their families, as they pursue education, the accumulation of cultural capital and the social reproduction of their class status through migration. I aim in this chapter to provide a more geographically sensitive account of cultural capital than has been hitherto achieved.

### **Education, class and mobility**

The interviews reveal 'differences both in the ability (or willingness) to overcome 'the friction of distance' and perceptual differences in spatial horizons. These differences have specific implications for the construction of futures for children.' (Ball et al. 1995, p. 413)

I want to return here to the research of Ball et al. (1995) (discussed in chapter 5) in order to highlight one aspect of my contribution to an understanding of the relationship between education, mobility and class in contemporary society. In their study of parental

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<sup>1</sup> The details of this sample were given in the Introduction to Section Two.

choice and schooling in Greater London, Ball et al. (1995) found that middle-class and working-class families demonstrated fundamentally different 'spatial horizons' with, as the above quotation indicates, significant consequences for the life-chances of their children. Aptly described as 'cosmopolitans', middle-class families were inclined to select a school located *outside* their immediate locality, indicating that distance was a contingent rather than determinant variable (Ball et al. 1995). In a similar vein and more recently, Butler (2003) has examined the educational strategies of 75 middle-class families in Islington, north London - an area undergoing gentrification. His research underlines the intersection of spatial mobility, perception and 'choice', as the following extract reveals:

'In many gentrified areas of inner London, there are often no local secondary schools which are regarded as 'acceptable' by middle-class parents [...] As a result, middle-class parents feel forced to send their children out of the borough to state selective or independent schools not just at secondary but also, to a lesser extent, at primary level [...] Not a single child in the study was being educated at a secondary school in Islington.' (p. 2481)

In my research, I have uncovered similar tendencies; middle-class families from Hong Kong are prepared to travel *internationally* and over a vast distance to seek out 'better' educational opportunities for their children. I would suggest that, theoretically, these two cases indicate the same process, that of cultural capital accumulation through the spatial strategies of middle-class families. International education has simply transformed the scale over which, for some families, these strategies are enacted.

## **Global and local geographies of educational distinction**

This thesis focuses in part upon the *symbolism* attached to the acquisition of foreign academic credentials, and how, at the broadest scale, these representations may determine patterns of international student mobility. Here I consider how symbolic representations of international education intersect with the family strategies of East Asian immigrants in Vancouver.<sup>2</sup> During interviews, several students indicated their understanding of a very particular global geography of higher education:

**Pete:** Hong Kong is still affected by Western countries, right? So the employers...if the employers had two choices, one is from Canada, one is from Hong Kong...I think the employer would choose me rather than the one with Hong Kong U degree.

*JW:* Is that because of the Western influence?

**P:** I think that's because of the English level.

*JW:* Do you think employers are aware that you may not know as much as someone from Hong Kong?<sup>3</sup> Do you think that's important to them?

**P:** I think that English is the most important thing that they are considering. As long as you can communicate with Western people, so they can have trade with other companies [...] If they had choices they would choose the one from the Western countries rather than....

*JW:* Is this something that everyone knows?

**P:** Yeah.

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<sup>2</sup> The intention here is to show how current immigrant students perceive the value of different education systems in a global context. A far more detailed exposition of the embedded, contextualised meanings of a Canadian education (as cultural capital) is to be found in chapter 8, when I analyse interview data from research with returnee graduates. For various reasons, including maturity and experience, the returnees displayed a far more sophisticated understanding of how their Canadian cultural capital has enabled them to 'get on' in Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> This question was asked in the context of a discussion where Pete was of the opinion that students learn more at school in Hong Kong than they do in Canada.

*JW: Is it UBC or is it North American or...? What is it that is so special?*

**P: The school is not the main point, the main reason. I think overseas is the main reason.**

*JW: What country do people from Hong Kong generally pick?*

**P: Umm...Probably the same: the United States, Australia or Canada.**

Pete's depiction is broadly representative of the majority of participants' views. Their attribution of 'value' to different national education systems generally followed a predictable pattern, revealing, as expected, an overt bias towards Western, English-speaking countries (Mitchell 1997b, Ong 1999, British Council 2004),<sup>4</sup> with little concern for potential differences within this broad classificatory framework. A few students, however, did make reference to a hierarchy of national systems, as indicated here:

*JW: In terms of getting an overseas education, how would you rank the different countries?*

**Emma: Umm...I used to think that the States would be one of the best. I still kind of think that, but I don't really like the States now. Sometimes I think that the States is too bossy to other countries [...] Their education might be good but that is another thing [...] I think England would be nice. Maybe Hong Kong follows an English education system, so [I wonder] what would it be like to actually be in England instead if just following its education system in Hong Kong. And then Canada would come next after England. Japan would be interesting if, like, you were there to learn a language or to learn something specific. Maybe designs or stuff like that. That would be nice, but I'm not into that, so it would be fun to spend maybe one or two years exchange there. Umm...Australia would come last.**

*JW: Why?*

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<sup>4</sup> As I have noted previously, according to Ong (1999) a Western education represents the 'ultimate' form of symbolic capital for wealthy Asian business families.

**E: I don't know, maybe because of my parents' [views]. It's cheaper to study in Australia, is what I heard, but some of the degree programmes, people don't take it as seriously. So it's like, you can get a degree here, you can get it in Australia, and probably Hong Kong employers would employ the ones that graduated with a Canadian degree.**

Richard is particularly scathing on the issue of Australian higher education:

*JW: Does it matter where the degree is from?*

**Richard: I'm not sure, like, so many people go to Australian universities. They're kind of 'garbage' universities. You just study a programme and I don't know what you get...So I'm not sure if they [Hong Kong employers] accept that.**

This 'devaluing' of Australian education is worthy of greater attention than I am able to give it here; it is symptomatic of a much wider campaign (as hinted in chapters 2 and 3) with potential repercussions for the strategic position of Australia in the global market of higher education.<sup>5</sup>

More generally, my interviews support the analysis undertaken in chapter 2, highlighting the extent to which, in a very short time, the global geography of cultural capital has become entrenched. It offers the most compelling explanation for broad patterns of international student mobility, illuminating some of the mechanisms through which status and value have been conferred upon a few education systems and not, significantly, on others.

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<sup>5</sup> Both the *South China Morning Post* and *The Financial Times* have carried stories and letters attacking the quality of Australia's higher education. Similar (unprompted) views were expressed by the Director of the International Office at UBC, and by the Director of international recruitment at the University of Wales, Swansea. The opinions of the latter were aired at a British Council educational exhibition in Hong Kong. He suggested that if parents were prepared to write the cheque, Australian universities would offer their child a place on the spot.

## Local geographies of cultural capital

‘Reputation and image are key to understanding the position of the elite schools and for individual parents general reputations are often supported by first-hand reports. The middle-class respondents were likely to refer to *multiple sources of information relating to the reputations and practices* of the schools they were considering and those they had dismissed.’ (Ball et al. 1995, p.66, emphasis added)

When viewed alongside the high profile, institutionalised marketing and ‘branding’ of education (described in chapters 2 and 3), students’ perceptions of different national education systems are relatively unremarkable. In Hong Kong, middle-class families possess a common understanding of ‘overseas’ education and governments, organisations and individual institutions have taken advantage of this fact, using education fairs and other marketing tools to create a distinguished image for their particular ‘product’. More intriguing, perhaps, are the unexpected accounts of *local* cultural capital, distinctive to Vancouver. These betray the existence and import of ‘unofficial’ classifications, generated and perpetuated through the discourses and geographically embedded practices of immigrants and their families.

The significance of localised cultural capital for the families of international students was highlighted during an interview with the Manager of the International Education Programme at the Vancouver School Board, Barbara Onstad. She described her experiences of international student ‘placement’ within the school district, revealing some fascinating dimensions to the issues of parental ‘choice’ and international mobility in education:

**Ms. Onstad:** We let all the applicants know that their school placement is based on available places at the school and appropriate programmes available at the school. And on the application forms that the students fill out they can list up to three preferences for schools in our district. And they do! *Laughs.*

*JW: Do you find that there is a preference for particular schools?*

**O:** Yes! Yes! From our district perspective, you know, we believe all our schools are great schools and so...we don't make the distinction that some members of the public seem to make. It's driven by two things. One, as you are probably aware, is that in most Asian countries - and that is where the majority of our students are coming from - the education system streams schools. There are different *levels* of schools. So people, when they come here, they definitely expect that to be the case here, and so they are basically finding out which schools are the best. Of course we never, we don't have such a thing as ranking schools or anything like that, so that they have to search elsewhere to satisfy their need for that information. And the Fraser Institute report<sup>6</sup> is one thing that both some parents use and also agents. And the role of agents is quite critical in this whole piece, because the agents know very well that their clients are looking for this kind of information and they will do their best to provide it however they can. So agents can make up a list or base it on some other things that are happening or whatever, so...So we know very well that that exists out there, and that people have biases towards particular schools, some applicants. (Emphasis added)

*JW: Are there any particular countries that have similar biases?*

**O:** Korea, Hong Kong, those are the two prime ones. And then to a lesser extent Taiwan...We don't have that bias particularly from other countries.

There are several important issues emerging from this reflective account of student preferences. As Ms. Onstad indicates and as I discussed in chapter 6, explicating the

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<sup>6</sup> The Fraser Institute is an 'independent public policy organization' that 'focuses on the role competitive markets play in providing for the economic and social well-being of all Canadians and as an international forum for policy ideas' (*The Fraser Institute* 2004). The organisation promotes the belief that an 'education market, one in which parents choose their children's schools and schools compete more freely for students, will produce better educational results for children.' (ibid.) The institute 'rates' and 'ranks' Canada's secondary schools through a programme of 'School Report Cards'. It has published Report Cards on secondary schools in BC since 1998, Alberta since 1999, Quebec since 2000 and Ontario since 2001. Elementary school Report Cards are now published for BC, Ontario and Alberta. (*The Fraser Institute* 2004).



motivations underlying family strategies necessitates understanding the social and cultural milieu (or *habitus*) within which particular attitudes regarding schooling and society have formed. More important for this discussion, however, is the relationship between social class, 'knowledge' and local embeddedness. Several writers have argued that 'choice' in education depends upon the availability and use of particular types of knowledge or information,<sup>7</sup> which in turn are determined by resources related to social class (Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, Ball et al. 1995, Ball 2003).<sup>8</sup> The employment of the Fraser Institute 'report cards' indicates the convergence of middle-class family demands for education-related knowledge and the wider transformation of international education, whereby ranking and measurement have become increasingly prevalent (see chapter 2). The use of agents or 'educational consultants' is similarly indicative. The 'globalisation' of education has meant that local knowledge now flows within transnational, trans-*local* circuits – in this case between Vancouver and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. Middle-class families will draw on a variety of resources, including their wealth, in order to acquire it.

Several of my participants referred to their parents' use of agencies, prior to immigration, when seeking local knowledge:

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<sup>7</sup> Although these are subtly different terms, knowledge and information are not distinguished in the literature. Knowledge, I would suggest, is more applicable in most of the circumstances described here, because it implies a deeper appreciation of the cultural and social context of its application. Nevertheless, they will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu (1986) equates cultural capital with possession of certain types of knowledge. Coleman (1988) has written on how access to information is determined by 'social capital'. Both writers emphasise the importance of social class in determining prior possession of social or cultural capital.

**Jill:** Actually what happened was before they decided [to immigrate] they visited once here. I'm not sure what that was, it was more like an immigration tour.

*JW: Did an agency arrange that?*

**J:** Yeah, something like that. They took you out here to Vancouver and Toronto...what they do is they show you the residence environment, the schools and the schooling, that was at the peak period of promoting immigration. So they had agencies.

*JW: Was that a Taiwanese or Canadian agency?*

**J:** Taiwanese agency I believe.

Pursuing the issue of localised cultural capital, I conducted an interview with a 'private educational consultant' working in Vancouver. When Pearl Ng immigrated to Canada from Taiwan with her two young children, she undertook an extensive investigation into local schools. Subsequently, she saw a gap in the (international education) market, which she was then able to exploit. In the following interview extracts, she gives an interesting insight into her line of work:

*JW: Tell me your job title and a little about what your work involves.*

**N:** OK. I am working as an educational consultant helping mainly the students from Taiwan or Hong Kong or China, to help them find the right school or right programme to start with.

Her own educational history is instructive of her personal views on the value of an 'overseas education' for East Asian families:

**N:** I was educated in the United States. I had my graduate studies in the University of Oregon...And I had already come to Vancouver before, way back in the '70s. That was a holiday. I came up and I visited UBC as well. I kind of

knew the study environment in the States because I had my Master's degree from Eugene. And then I taught in California, one of the high schools in the Bay area. So I had some ideas about how the North American life is – especially the school system – so we took the risk and uprooted, and moved the children here. So that's how I started searching all the different schools and the programmes. I became very aware of what's going on in the ESL, public school programmes and in some of the private schools. We are Christians and so I particularly focussed on the Christian schools, but [...] I didn't find anything that was creative or positive from the educational angle, so I decided not to send them to a Christian school. Instead I put them in a public school....

She describes how what started as a personal concern turned into a lucrative and successful business enterprise, attracting wealthy Chinese families needing to acquire local knowledge of educational opportunities in Vancouver:

**N:** At first I started doing this for my own children, and 'cause I accumulate some kind of experiences and also because I have English proficiency, then most of the mothers from Taiwan, or Hong Kong and China, [thought] I probably could help them to communicate with school boards or the school principals or with the ESL teachers or even the private tutors, and find out which one is the best match for that particular child.

And some of our friends realised my effort and so they sent their children and asked me to do the arrangements for their children. So first of all I would take the child – maybe teenager or older child – for assessment to a psycho-educational office. A very complete assessment. And then through the research I could tell their strengths and their weaknesses [...] So I tried to find the right programme. And the area that I searched covered Richmond, Surrey, North Delta, White Rock and Burnaby, Vancouver, even up to North Vancouver. I used the different institutes and programmes.

I started this company [and] my husband is a partner. During the summer we recruit the students to come here for overseas study, from Taiwan, for one month or two months [...] The parents like them to go to New Zealand, Australia, the States or Canada to do the overseas study, especially language learning [...] So we help to put the students every year to place in different homes, local families. I think that's a better idea. The kids know what it's exactly like in a foreign country. Some experience and some taste of the difficulties, the actual classroom settings in North America [...] I think that's a

**better idea and I strongly recommend that instead of just dumping the kids here! *Laughs.***

In this last sentence, Ms. Ng refers to the so-called 'satellite kids' phenomenon, when shortly after immigration parents return to Asia to continue with their business or career, leaving the children in Vancouver to attend school (Waters 2003a, 2003b). This is an extreme example of the 'flexible strategising' practiced by some Chinese immigrant families, and I provide further explanation of these circumstances below. Pearl Ng is herself part of an 'astronaut family' – the nature of their business necessitates that her husband work in Asia for most of the year, recruiting prospective students, whilst she stays in Vancouver. They advertise 'through the web site and through word of mouth. Not the newspaper'. Students will often return to Vancouver, leading to a more permanent period of study in Canada:

**N: Oh, we have quite a few coming for the second time...If they thought it wasn't interesting they [the parents] wouldn't spend so much money to send them again. They could choose other places. 'Cause you know their parents are wealthy enough to pay all their expenses. Some of the parents who are teachers encourage them to go to England or to New Zealand or to Australia for their second trip. But quite a few students come back. They wanted to come back to me! [...] They go back and study hard and get in to a good high school and then after a couple of years they come again [...] And they will either choose the university in the States or here, in UBC.**

The parental preferences highlighted here serve once again to underscore the symbolic power of the global map of cultural capital.

Providing a fascinating, parallel example of these processes at work in the UK middle-class, parents have been recently observed to exercise 'choice' by purchasing houses, at

great expense, in desirable school catchment areas. Suggestively, the process has been dubbed 'selection by mortgage,' to indicate the fact that some public-sector schools are so popular that they are forced to 'select' their pupils on the basis of whether or not their parents can afford to own a house in the designated catchment area.<sup>9</sup> The trend in middle-class families buying houses near to desirable schools has led to a substantial reduction in school catchment areas around the most desired schools, whilst house prices in these areas have correspondingly risen dramatically (Townsend 2003). Whilst I do not doubt that similar practices have been at work in Vancouver, I did not uncover sufficient evidence to make any substantial claims. I did, however, happen across a related and an unexpected side to the industry that has very recently emerged in response to the international demand for overseas schooling; in the following interview extract, Karen imparts an interesting tale of her own family's experiences of immigration. I asked her whether her parents knew anything about public schools in Vancouver before they arrived:

**Karen:** I think they did because they never talked about sending me to a private school. I think it had to do with, like, because we were so new we knew, like, nothing, so like we didn't really have a choice. If my parents' friends recommended going to this school then we would buy a house near that school, right?

*JW:* So your parents already had friends whose kids went to the school you went to?

**K:** Yeah, yeah, because the school...they recommended an elementary school, it's called Diefenbaker. Yeah, my parents wanted to get a house near that area so I guess the friends' influence was really important.

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<sup>9</sup> Selection also depends upon whether a child already has a sibling in the school, providing an example of the importance of family social capital in school choice and academic achievement (Coleman 1988).

*JW: How easy was it for them to find a house? Did they have to go to an estate agent?*

**K: Umm...I think, no actually we just came here for three days and then we got a house.**

*JW: How did it happen so quickly?*

**K: Because everything was chaotic. When I first came I had a fever and my parents were, like, stressed out and we were living at their other friends' house. Basically they had two groups of friends and they lived in one group's house and they basically brought us around Richmond [a Vancouver suburb] and stuff. And we didn't really want to bother them that much and...umm...so we quickly got a house and listened to everything the other guy said. *Laughs*. And umm...later on we kind of found out that he probably got, like, referral fees from the real estate.**

*JW: Your parents didn't know?*

**K: No, they didn't know until, like, afterwards, and...ummm... it must have been like a year after. And we also got a car from another friend....**

*JW: Who got a bit of money from it?*

**K: Yes! Quote, unquote friends!! *Laughs*. Yeah...**

*JW: Your parents just didn't know...*

**K: No, no, and we were kind of forced to do...well, not forced, but like, persuaded to buy certain things that were not in our best interests.**

*JW: Are your parents still in contact with these friends?*

**K: Umm, no, not much.**

It would seem, as Portes (1998) has recently claimed, that the social capital most often associated with immigrant communities might not always be benign.

## **The magical properties of the university degree**

Dr. Peters, the principal of an international school in downtown Vancouver, draws attention to the *symbolic* meaning of higher education for the parents of international students:

**'To Asian parents the word university is magic. The word college has no appeal. Absolutely none.'**<sup>10</sup>

This encapsulates the symbolism inherent in the internationalisation of education and in the educational objectives of middle-class Chinese families. Bourdieu (1984) has talked about the 'magical effects' of credentials, which 'impose recognition' on their beholder. Yet 'magic' is perhaps misleading, in so far as it serves to conceal the *strategies* and power that underpin this pursuit of education across the world.

My interviews reiterate this symbolic distinction between the 'college' and the 'university',<sup>11</sup> as Mark here indicates in a discussion about his friends:<sup>12</sup>

**M: Most of them go to UBC. You know what? Most of the Chinese people, they really want to go to UBC or SFU [Simon Fraser University]. They like to go to the [...] better reputation universities, only SFU, UVic [University of Victoria] or UBC. It's influenced by their parents, basically. Most of them told me that if you are going to Langara College, for example, if you get a diploma from Langara College you're just like a jerk.**

*JW: Is that parental pressure?*

**M: Yes, it is that the parents pressure so much. And in terms of the quality of the education I don't think it's that different, and I think the Profs. in Langara College can focus on individual student's performance better. And I think UBC**

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<sup>10</sup> Interview conducted in 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Aihwa Ong (1999) fails to recognise the importance of this distinction when she talks about the symbolic power of the 'American college degree' for East Asian families.

<sup>12</sup> All these friends are, like Mark, from Hong Kong.

**does not do that job. Most of the parents worry about a college diploma. It's never comparable to a university degree.**

Mark captures the essence of 'cultural capital'; it is the inherent *symbolism* of the university degree and not (necessarily) the quality of the pedagogic experience that bestows *value* in the cultural market place (Bourdieu 1996). He recognises that, due to smaller student numbers, colleges may in fact provide a better education, but this is irrelevant. The college diploma is '*never comparable to a university degree*' because the university possesses universal, global recognition and esteem, whilst the college does not. A few more examples emphasise the significance of the university as cultural capital. Scott went to UBC for a few years first, to please his parents, before moving to an Art college in Vancouver. He said:

**Scott: They don't think it's a university. It's better to graduate from a university, for them.**

Holly suggested that her 'overseas degree' would prove valuable even if she decided to work for her father, following her graduation, back in Hong Kong:

**Holly: 'Cause when my dad's meeting with his business friends and they hear 'oh your daughter's in UBC', they think that's really good, and that it's really hard to get in...I think typically in Hong Kong when they see that you have got a degree from a university that they know of in Canada they will think that you've achieved very well.**

*JW: What about SFU [Simon Fraser University in Vancouver]?*

**H: I personally don't think it's as easy to get into SFU, 'cause I know that their business programme is pretty hard to get into. But for some reason a lot of parents from Asia, they all think that UBC is better. It starts with University.** (Emphasis added)



I have underlined this final phrase for the way in which it embodies the myth-making inherent in the institutionalisation of cultural capital. What Bourdieu has written on the subject of the *Grandes Ecoles* could equally apply to these circumstances:

‘The existence of two separate channels, which, like the sacred and the profane, are mutually determined by the very relationship of exclusion that unites them, in itself reminds us that “elite schools” always fulfil a function of *consecration*, and that the technical operations of the educational process they accomplish are at one and the same time, and inseparably, moments of a *rite of institution* [...] In other words, the process of transformation accomplished at “elite schools,” through the magical operations of *separation* and *aggregation* [...] tends to produce a *consecrated* elite, that is, an elite that is not only distinct and separate, but also recognized by others and by itself as worthy of being so.’ (Bourdieu 1996, p. 102)

Parents with sufficient knowledge of local cultural capital (and the transnational circuits within which it flows) are more discerning. They will seek institutions with names that will *travel* (in these particular examples back to Hong Kong):<sup>13</sup>

**Emma:** My family has its own industry and so they talk to me about it, like, where you should go [to university] and stuff like that. Even *within* Vancouver: UBC, SFU, UVic.... SFU also accepted me. And it’s like ‘where should I go?’ *I* don’t know. I’ve never been to both places. Everything’s new to *me*. I just wanted to try. And my mum will go, ‘of course UBC! The reputation is better. If people look at your resume and you graduate from UBC, not SFU...’ So she’s like, *totally UBC!*

**Mark:** Partly why I picked UBC is that if you go to anyone in Hong Kong and they don’t know much about Canada [...] they’re like, ‘or you’re in Vancouver, you must go to UBC, right?’ They don’t know anything about SFU. They think

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<sup>13</sup> Parents were often aware of how the reputation of universities is perceived transnationally, and how these may intersect with trans-local circuits of knowledge production and exchange. In chapter 8 I will discuss in some detail how trans-local connections between Vancouver and Hong Kong give value to a UBC degree.

you're lying – 'are you sure it's in Canada?' So if you go to SFU it's not as good...They know UBC is in Vancouver, right?

*JW: Why do you think it's so well known?*

**M:** Partly because it's bigger than SFU and people...more people come here. I guess, most of my friends, their parents would rather they come to UBC. Even my parents would rather...They wouldn't make you – we could go to SFU – but they were like, 'why don't you think about UBC? It would be better.'

### **Spatial strategies and educational 'choice': 'timing' and money**

'It's really common, like, once they can't get into Hong Kong...Grade Eleven or whatever, they just come here [...] Yeah. It's like a way to solve a problem or whatever.' (Paul, age 17, Vancouver)

'A US passport doesn't get anyone into college or pay the tuition bills after admission. But in Korea it's viewed as an insurance policy: if a kid falters in the tough, local system, he can pick up and move and get onto the easier American path.' (Ko 2003, p. 1)

As I discussed in chapter 6, middle-class families in Hong Kong will employ various resources at their disposal to ensure their child's educational success. They are particularly well placed to overcome the 'friction of distance' in their choice of educational institution (Ball et al. 1995). In relation to these claims, the remainder of this chapter focuses on *migration strategies*. I examine, in other words, how middle-class families from East Asia *act upon* their knowledge of the multi-scale geographies of cultural capital.

In the introduction to this thesis I presented an apparent paradox that emerged from my data: Hong Kong immigrant students perceived education in Canada both as *a way out* of a highly competitive local system (where the potential for failure is high) *and* also

as a *more valuable* form of cultural capital. In the next chapter I will address the latter of these; here I focus on the necessity for migration in the face of academic failure.

In chapter 6 I described the recent process of educational democratisation in Hong Kong, resulting in a heightened sense of competition and stress for middle-class families all too aware of the importance of credentials for reproducing their social status. Bourdieu (1996) has written that the school system is more than just a means of imparting 'knowledge and know-how':

'it is equally clear that it also contributes, and increasingly so, to the distribution of power and privilege and to the legitimation of this distribution. It is currently the school that has the responsibility for performing the magical action of consecration that consists in effecting a series of more or less arbitrary breaks in the social continuum and in legitimating these breaks through symbolic acts that sanction and ratify them, establishing them as consistent with the nature of things and the hierarchy of beings by making them official through public, formal declarations...' (p. 116)

In Hong Kong success and failure in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) are formally declared through the publication and public display of examination results. In his analysis of schooling and social hierarchy in France, however, Bourdieu does not consider how the power of the system to consecrate status may be diminished through migration. In Hong Kong, students who fail or anticipate failure in the local system are able to seek an *alternative* system overseas that, furthermore, is perceived as more valuable in terms of the cultural capital it confers. I noted in chapter 5 that, as a consequence of educational expansion and the threat to class privilege, middle-class families will either 'seek to change the class mechanisms of exclusion and selection in education, or they will secede from state education' (Brown et

al. 1997, p. 15). My data have revealed that failure in the local education system has forced the hand of many middle-class families, whose only option (as they perceived it) was to emigrate and seek alternative (and 'better') opportunities overseas.

In support of these claims, a discernable pattern in the *timing* of emigration is apparent in the data. Emma was the only member of her immediate family in Canada when she started at UBC; she had completed her secondary schooling in Hong Kong before deciding that she wanted to 'try' Canada. Her sister had very recently joined her, however, at the insistence of the mother, to attend a school in Abbotsford. I asked her to explain why her sister had been sent to Canada in this seemingly abrupt way:

**Emma: Because she didn't do too well at school, back in high school in Hong Kong.**

*JW: Did she fail exams?*

**E: She'll have to take it next year. And with her grades in school she wasn't going to get anything close to getting up there.**

*JW: So your mum thought before that happens...*

**E: Yeah, we'll just send her over so she'll have Grade Eleven and Grade Twelve and that will make her get into university. Because you need all that Grade Twelve stuff. And then you need Grade Eleven stuff for the Grade Twelve stuff.**

In the case of Richard, his family decided to immigrate after his older sister had already spent two years in Canada on a student visa. In the response below, he underlines the ambiguity inherent in a phrase that was frequently used in these circumstances – the notion that one can get a 'better education' in Canada:

*JW: Why did your family immigrate?*

**R: Because they want a better education.**

*JW: Can you explain why they thought you and your sister would have a better education?*

**R: Because in Hong Kong there's too many exams and...like homework and assignments to do. Like secondary schools, [there are] two exams.**

*JW: At what ages?*

**R: Grade Eleven and Thirteen.**

*JW: You have to pass both of them?*

**R: You have to get really high marks to get into university. I think that [there are] 150 000 [students in] Grade Eleven in Hong Kong and only 20 000 get to the Grade Twelve.**

*JW: You left Hong Kong before you sat the exams, is that right?*

**R: Yeah, in Grade Eleven.**

*JW: Were your parents worried about how well you would do in the exams?*

**R: I was doing really bad...**

*JW: Why did they worry about you not going to university?*

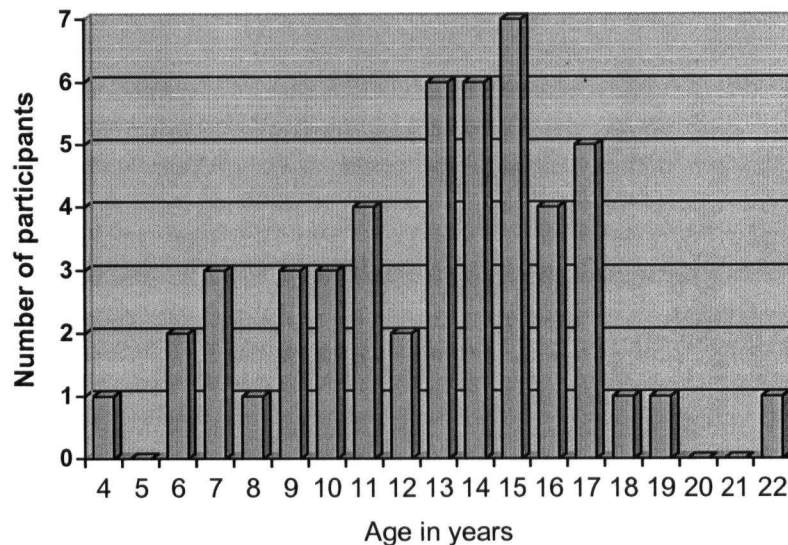
**R: In Chinese tradition it's like, if you don't have a degree you can't get a job.**

It was no coincidence, I suggest, that the modal age of my participants on arrival in Canada was 15 years, with clustering around the years leading up to 15 (figure 7.1). At 16, students sit the critical HKCEE and failure in this exam is widely assumed to indicate the abrupt end of a child's academic career in Hong Kong. A second stage in immigration can also be identified in these data, with clustering around the age of 16 and 17, just prior

to the next most critical examination in a child's schooling – the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) – upon the results of which university places are decided.

The importance of a sibling's academic success/failure in the timing of immigration was also underlined in the interview data. As I discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the social reproduction strategies of the East Asian middle-class are overwhelmingly *familial*; education is a family project; it often only takes one child to fail for the relocation of the whole family to Canada.

**Figure 7.1: Age at Immigration (Vancouver Participants)**



In what follows, I draw upon my interview data to demonstrate the prevalence and meaning of academic failure in the context of education-led family migration to Vancouver:

*JW: Why did your parents decide to emigrate?*

**Nelly:** Because of the handover of Hong Kong, that was the main reason, and my brother. You know, in Hong Kong there's an HKCEE, it's an examination, like the provincial exam. If you don't pass it you can't go to Grade Twelve and you can't go to university. So my brother took the exam but he didn't do very well

*JW: Did he fail?*

**N:** [He] kind of failed. He needed fourteen marks in order to go to the next grade and I think he just got nine. So my father decided to go to Canada.

The timing of Nelly's immigration was clearly related to her brother's failure.

**Steve:** In Taiwan, there are two provincial exams. When you graduate from Grade Nine and one from Grade Twelve. I came here in Grade Ten so I don't have the chance to have the Grade Twelve exam.

Steve claims to have obtained quite high marks in Grade Nine, and was placed in a reputable high school for Grade Ten. It was then that his marks began to slip:

**S:** I didn't study hard so!!! Laughs. So I came to Canada.

*JW: Did you fail?*

**S:** No I didn't fail, but I think I wouldn't [have] passed the Grade Twelve exams. I wanted to change the place to study.

Jeremy talked about his experience and those of his siblings:

*JW: What do you remember [about school]?*

**J: [It was] very frustrating because I didn't do that good in Hong Kong. When I came here I did pretty good. Yeah, that's the main difference.**

*JW: Are your brothers and sisters older than you?*

**J: My sister is younger.**

*JW: What were their experiences in Hong Kong?*

**J: They didn't do too good in school too. And that's another main reason why we moved here. Because there are more universities here than in Hong Kong.**

*JW: So were your parents concerned...*

**J: Yeah, they were concerned about our education.**

*JW: Did they think maybe you'd not get into university in Hong Kong?*

**J: *Laughs* Not with my marks! There's more opportunity here than back there.**

It became clear after several interviews that when, frequently, participants talked about the 'opportunities' Canada presented in terms of education, this often referred to the opportunity to *continue* with their education. In these circumstances, the 'ability' of students to achieve a higher level of education may, therefore, be fairly unrelated to academic success; rather, the acquisition of higher-level credentials depends upon *spatial mobility*, enabled by the possession of *family capital*<sup>14</sup> and linked to middle-class socio-economic status.

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<sup>14</sup> It can be seen how these circumstances may, in fact, undermine the meritocratic principles of the local education system in Hong Kong if, when middle-class children fail, they can simply up and leave, perpetuating their class position through an alternative, overseas system of credentialisation.



In the following example, Evan is reluctant to admit to failure, although he implies as much. He gave a typical response to the question of why his family had immigrated to Canada:

**Evan:** Because they [his parents] think that in Canada the education system is better than in Hong Kong.

*JW:* What were your parents' thoughts on this?

**E:** I think that the main purpose of the migration was that me and my brother didn't study well in Hong Kong, and there was a lot of stress and the standard was very high in Hong Kong. But in Canada, the general level of education...a large proportion of students can get into the universities.

*JW:* Did you fail exams or were you likely to fail?

**E:** Likely to fail. I didn't get the chance to go to university.

*JW:* Did you try the exams and fail?

**E:** Not fail, but not meet the standard.

*JW:* If you hadn't come here what would have been the situation?

**E:** I think I would have looked for a job and would have been working now.

This last example underscores two particularly salient points. The first is that the word 'better' (like 'opportunities'), when used in relation to education in Canada, must be critically appraised in each instance. It is clear as this extract progresses that whilst claiming that education in Canada is 'better' may be a simple response to a question concerning the motivations for family immigration, it may not be an accurate one; in many cases, a 'better education' actually related to the *opportunity to continue* in education – an opportunity denied to 'failing' participants in Hong Kong. The second

point concerns the evident repercussions of not immigrating; Evan had no doubt that his options for higher education in Hong Kong were clearly exhausted and that, had he stayed there, he would now be in or seeking employment. Mark indicates the negative repercussions of failing and remaining in Hong Kong:

*JW: Why did your family immigrate to Canada?*

**Mark: Because the education system in Canada is better than the one in Hong Kong, less competitive. In Hong Kong it's more like a pyramid, right? If you can't get certain grades you can't go on to post-secondary level education.**

He went onto explain the significance of the HCKEE:

**M: The HKCEE is like, a universal examination just like the provincial exam in Canada, and they tend to ask really hard questions in Hong Kong. Most people have exam anxiety and they will just fail the exam. They just can't go on to the next level. That's why the Hong Kong education system is so depressing, compared to Canada's education system, which is more like, if you don't do well in the provincial exam you can try again next year, or in May. You can try it three times in a year. But in Hong Kong you can only try it once a year and you can only try it twice. If you fail it more than that you just...You just get a low job or your self esteem will just go down so badly.**

*JW: have you got friends who have failed?*

**M: Yes.**

*JW: And what happened to them?*

**M: One of my friends works for a cleaners company. He just cleans floors and stuff like that. He used to get similar grades to me. But he just failed exams badly so he couldn't go on.**

The propensity towards failure in Hong Kong is supported in the data by the frequently asserted notion that the Hong Kong education system is in fact more

academically rigorous that the system in Canada. Emma claims to have taken the *hard and unusual* educational path by remaining in Hong Kong:

**Emma:** All my cousins – I have 11, 12 cousins above me and...at least 7 of them graduated from Vancouver: high school, college, UBC, SFU [...] I'm, like, the only one who actually completed the whole high school system in Hong Kong.

*JW:* So they came at various stages...How many took their complete high school here?

**E:** I think just one or two. They tend not take the provincial exams [HKCEE] in Hong Kong. They'd skip that.

*JW:* How do they see the fact that you took everything in Hong Kong?

**E:** How do they see it? They say to me, 'you're good, you're great'. But to me it's like I don't know why I had to do the whole stuff. It's like, 'all you guys took the easy way out!' Why the hell did I stay there? But I talked about it with my family and they said, 'it's the hard way, you are taking the hard way'. But probably you get more out of life and stuff. I guess that's one thing that made me come over, because all my cousins had tried out their life here. It's like, I want to try out here too.

In the next example, Pete raises once again the paradox that a degree brought to Hong Kong from Canada may undermine the value of local academic achievement:

*JW:* Can you describe your experience of school in Hong Kong?

**Pete:** I mean, the education in Hong Kong is actually quite different from here. The stuff here I learn is easier...except English. The level there, I mean in Hong Kong, is actually very high. 'Cause I've still got a few friends in Hong Kong; they told me that what I'm learning right now – I'm a third year economics student – what I'm learning this year is like what they did in Grade Twelve high school. So the difference is very big right? So if I, for example, if I can't get in UBC or in any college and I went back to Hong Kong I don't think I can catch up everything.

*JW: If you were to take your UBC degree back to Hong Kong how do you think employers would view that degree?*

**P: I think I'm in the advantage [...] If the employers had two choices, one is from Canada, one is from Hong Kong...Hong Kong U degree, I think the employer would choose me rather than the one with Hong Kong U degree.**

In a different illustration of the importance of the 'timing' of migration, Jenny talks about her experience of family separation. Her father remained in Hong Kong as an 'astronaut'. I asked her if she found the separation from her father difficult to deal with:

**Jenny: It's not quite a big impact, because if we didn't emigrate to Canada we [she and her siblings] would still have gone to Canada for study. It's either the whole family move or me and my brother and sister.**

*JW: Did they [parents] want to send you as an international student when you were younger?*

**J: No, they wouldn't do that until I was Grade Nine [and] by that time we had decided to emigrate. My brother went one year before. He went there as a visa student.**

*JW: Why?*

**J: Because that was my parents' plan. They had already planned to send us to Canada to study by the age of 15 or so.**

*JW: Had your brother just turned 15?*

**J: Yeah, in Canada. And then one year later the whole family moved...He had just finished Grade Nine and was going into Grade Ten.**

In an extreme example of the 'long-range planning' characteristic of middle-class families (Ball et al. 1995, Ball 2003), the HKCEE had determined these children's mobility for many years prior to emigration.

To reiterate the broader theoretical implications of these observations, I quote Bourdieu (1996), who has written:

'[O]ne of the most crucial powers of an educational institution is undeniably its ability to consecrate or, on the other hand, to relegate, degrade, or symbolically abase. Economic power holders, who sometimes fall victim to its magical effect, can counter it with the pedagogic action of institutions whose primary function is undoubtedly to erase not only one's academic past but also the social and psychological stigma inflicted by the educational system.' (p. 224)

Canada's education system serves, at least in part, to 'erase' the academic past of immigrant students, as described here by Bourdieu, whilst at the same time improving their chance of success in the future. For middle-class families increasingly reliant on educational credentials to guarantee their social status, failure is not an option and an overseas education offers a viable alternative to the highly competitive local system. This leads me to address an important question that has been largely neglected to this point: why did these families choose *immigration* over a temporary study permit for their children? The answer to this apparent conundrum lies with two different realms, one empirical, one conceptual. I begin by addressing empirically the question of why families chose to immigrate.

## Immigration and the financial calculation

Permanent settlement in Canada was not part of the plan for 68 percent of the university students that I interviewed in Vancouver. Despite the fact that 90 percent have Canadian citizenship, the majority stated their intention to leave Canada after university graduation, and most of these would return to Asia. So it is not immediately obvious why the family sought 'permanent resident' status in Canada. As the following interview extract attests, the answer was unequivocal:

*JW: People here [in Hong Kong] tend to emigrate rather than go [to Canada] as international students, is that right?*

**Carl: Because international students have to pay three times more than what the local students have to pay [...] If you are an immigrant like, maybe for example an investment immigrant, you have to invest money...But when you do the calculations it is still cheaper – much cheaper – than to go there and study as an international student. So maybe some families make that decision based on the kids' future. Some families, for example my friend, they will stay there until the son or the daughter has finished their education and then they will move back to Hong Kong and continue their life, working. So you can see that it's an investment. It's an investment in a financial way.<sup>15</sup>**

The most popular route of entry into Canada for my participants' families was as 'investors' under the Business Immigration Program, which requires a one off \$400, 000 payment, reclaimed after five years (without interest) (CIC 2000).

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Onstad of VSB noted that many children's status would change (from international student to permanent resident) during a programme (she wouldn't guess the percentage, she said, but not quite half). Parents have to inform the school board of this change because they can then stop paying fees. In Hong Kong, the costs associated with international schooling have been fairly well publicised in the local media, it would seem. In the *South China Morning Post*, I found an article on 'The Price of Schooling' for the US, Canada, the UK and Australia, as well as for international schools in Hong Kong (Li 1999). Its focus upon a few select countries, and upon a few select universities within those countries, betrays the particular international geography of desirable education as perceived from Hong Kong.

To exemplify this point on the relative costs of education, table 7.1 provides a breakdown of tuition fees at UBC for the Winter Session of 2003. For students reading commerce (the most popular degree course amongst participants), the *difference* in fees alone for immigrant and international students is striking: over \$12,000 per year. In engineering the annual overseas differential exceeds \$15,000. In addition, most of my participants had several years of secondary schooling in Vancouver. As an international student, this would have cost \$200 application fee plus \$11, 000 per year for schools within the Vancouver district (VSB 2003); for landed immigrants and citizens, secondary-level education is free, with the added bonus of citizenship after 3 years of residency.<sup>16</sup> Betty portrays the pragmatism underlying the family decision to migrate:

**Betty:** So when I was very young my oldest brother, he went to the US for education, as an international student. But then my father found that the tuition is really expensive and...and then he found out that he won't be able to afford two more children to go to some place outside Hong Kong. I have two brothers; I am the youngest. So he decided to migrate to Canada for the whole family so that me and my second older brother can study in Canada.

*JW: Why Canada?*

**B:** Because at that time Canada was cheaper and easier than the US, to invest. And the immigration rules in the US are much stricter than in Canada....Actually, for education, most people think that the US is better.

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<sup>16</sup> I will show in the conclusion how Canadian citizenship will allow these students' children similar access to free education in Canada, suggesting the longer term intergenerational benefits of immigration.

**Table 7.1**

The following chart presents tuition fees for the eight months of Winter Session 2003 at UBC (September to April). Beginning in May 2003, undergraduate tuition is calculated as \$529 per credit for international (visa) students, and \$115.30 per credit for Canadian citizens and permanent residents (exceptions are indicated).

Program	Credits in first year full course load	Canadian citizens and permanent residents	International (visa) students
Agroecology	34	\$3,920	\$17,986
Applied Science (Engineering) <sup>1</sup>	37	\$4,266	\$19,573
Arts, Fine Arts, Human Kinetics, Social Work, Wood Products Processing	30	\$3,459	\$15,870
Commerce <sup>2</sup>	31 - 32	\$4,796 - \$4,950	\$16,399 - \$16,928
Forestry	33	\$3,805	\$17,457
Global Resource Systems	31 - 32	\$3,574 - \$3,690	\$16,399 - \$16,928
Music, Food, Nutrition and Health	31 - 36	\$3,574 - \$4,151	\$16,399 - \$19,044
Natural Resources Conservation	32	\$3,690	\$16,928
Nursing	24 - 30	\$2,767 - \$3,459	\$12,696 - \$15,870
Pharmacy <sup>3</sup>	31	\$5,115	\$16,399
Science	30 - 38	\$3,459 - \$4,381	\$15,870 - \$20,102

<sup>1</sup> The per credit fee for Canadian citizens and permanent residents in Applied Science year 1 is \$115.30. In years 2-5 it is \$124.30.

<sup>2</sup> The per credit fee for Canadian citizens and permanent residents in Commerce years 2-4 is \$154.70.

<sup>3</sup> The per credit fee for Canadian citizens and permanent residents in Pharmacy is \$165.00.

Note: All costs are shown in Canadian dollars.

Source of table: UBC Calendar 2003/2004



Migration is often shaped by a powerful social discourse:

*JW: Why didn't they [your parents] send you over as an international student, so you could live with your grandparents? They went through a lot of hassle for you all to immigrate...*

**Anna:** I think they had also calculated the economic cost for that. I think the education cost for international students is actually very high...I think my grandparents did some research for them...Yeah, and they heard from so many friends that they sent their kids out to study overseas but actually it cost them six times more than local immigrants or local citizens...That's why the whole family just... filed immigration status rather than sending the kids overseas under the international student status.

Craig highlights the role of 'consultants' in his family's immigration and the pivotal importance of his education. The costs of education were clearly *the* deciding factor:

**Craig:** Before they considered moving to Canada they were thinking about shipping me to London for school. As you know, it is very expensive, a foreign school, so they are thinking: 'instead of shipping me only, why don't we go as a family, so that my brother could get the same overseas experience, spending the same amount of money?'

*JW: How long before were you aware that you would go [to Canada instead]?*

**C:** Almost a year. I had no objection to that, because lots of people around me are moving. I thought it would be nice. I was ready to go to London anyway, I was going to go to the UK.

*JW: How far did you take the application?*

**C:** I was accepted by the school. It was pretty much done. I just had to pack my luggage.

*JW: What made your parents decide to emigrate?*

**C:** They were talking to immigration consultants. They were weighing the alternatives – 'to send my boy to the UK to study from Grade Ten to finish university will cost a lot of money, right, as an overseas student? Or shall we do

**that as a family?’**

In the end, the decision came down to financial expedience. Craig and his brother could attend school and then university in Canada, all for the cost of sending just Craig to a school in the UK. In cases such as these, it is hard (if not impossible) to separate the objectives of the immigrant student and those of the international student, underlining the ultimate purpose of *both strategies: the reproduction of family class status through the accumulation of cultural capital.*

### **Transnational family strategies**

The immigration of the *family* under these circumstances is also explicable when we look beyond official definitions of ‘immigrant’ and ‘temporary resident’ and the long-standing assumptions that underpin these categories, to observe the motivations and experiences of the immigrants themselves. The tendency to fall back upon a traditional conception of immigration (with a notion of the assimilation of immigrant groups over time (Gordon 1964)) can foreclose the possibility that institutionally defined ‘immigrants’ may in reality practice quite *diverse forms* of immigration. This point has been convincingly argued by Basch et al. (1994) and demonstrated subsequently in a now extensive scholarship on transnational mobility (see chapter 4). In some cases, migrant groups may maintain two or more homes in spatially distant countries, without being fully or completely incorporated into either. It is this expanded definition of immigration, and not the officially endorsed category, that applies most readily to the experiences of the participants in this study.

At this point I want to address my contribution to two ostensibly different academic literatures by demonstrating the spatial and social ‘flexibility’ of the immigrant family. I have written previously on this notion of the ‘flexible family’ and what it entails in the case of Chinese migrants in Vancouver (Waters 2002, 2003a, 2003b, Ley and Waters 2004). Firstly, I seek to contribute to research, discussed above and in chapter 5, which examines the intersection of education, class and spatial mobility at the local scale (Ball et al. 1995, Butler 2003) by focussing upon the significance of ‘family organisation’. Ball et al. (1995) have observed that for middle-class parents ‘family organisation seems to be less of a constraint’ than for their working-class counterparts (p 419). They explain:

‘In the case of the working class respondents, choice of secondary school was a contingent decision rather than an open one. Ideas about school were often subordinated to considerations of the constraints of family and locality [...] Thus, ‘choice’ of school fits into the practicalities of ‘getting by’ rather than into some grander social agenda of ‘new, rarer and more distinct goods’ (Bourdieu 1984: 247). School has to be ‘fitted’ into a set of constraints and expectations related to work roles, family roles, the sexual division of labour and the demands of household organisation. And the material and cultural aspects of this are difficult to separate. For our middle-class respondents it was much more common to find family roles and household organisation being accommodated to school.’ (p. 411 – 412)

They continue:

‘Among our working class respondents social reproduction takes on a more immediate quality, it is more closely tied to a sense of locale and community [...] That is to say, reproduction is definite and constrained and achieved within a spatial framework.’ (p. 412)

It is here, I believe, that research on local-scale educational strategies and an ostensibly different body of work examining migration and the contemporary Chinese diaspora can

be fruitfully engaged. I provided the theoretical context to this latter work in chapter 4; in different ways it highlights the centrality of the family in the spatial strategies of recent (and overwhelmingly wealthy) Chinese migrants (e.g. Mitchell 1995, 1997c, Ong and Nonini 1997, Tseng 1997, Ong 1999, Hamilton 1999, Ley 1999, 2000, Waters 2002, 2003a, 2003b).

My research contributes directly to both of these areas of scholarship. For middle-class Chinese immigrants, 'family roles and household organisation' (Ball et al. 1995, p. 412) are very much planned around the child's education. The immigration of the family indicates the extent to which education is a *family* objective, not an individualistic pursuit.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, I demonstrate the significant spatial and social flexibility of the immigrant family, facilitating the accumulation of multiple forms of capital simultaneously within the household unit (Ong 1999, Waters 2000, 2002). Turning now to the data, the following interview extract reveals how education and family strategies utilise space, place and mobility in intricate and fascinating ways.

*JW: He's [her father] in Hong Kong now?*

**Alison: My family is what they call astronauts. So they come back and fore.**

*JW: So how long does he spend in Vancouver?*

**A: That depends on when he has holidays [...] A month or so.**

Alison's father works for a law firm in Hong Kong, and kept his job when his family immigrated to Canada nine years ago.

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<sup>17</sup> For all but a couple of my research participants, the family was the key source of funding for their education in Canada.

*JW: How long has he been doing this?*

**A: Since 1995. But my family is different because three or four years ago my brother just finished grade nine and he went back to Hong Kong for study, and my mum went back with him also.**

*JW: Can you explain that?*

**A: OK, like, that's what we call like a flow, and a flow is like going back. They went back because my brother wants to study in England and he wants to study law [...] He went back there to international school. And then my mum went back with him too. And I was here alone since then.**

*JW: Were you happy with that situation?*

**A: Definitely! Yes! I'm very happy with that!**

*JW: Why?*

**A: Maybe because my mum's not here and I can do whatever I like. And it's like a good way to learn independence. Definitely.**

*JW: Is your brother still at international school?*

**A: No, he just graduated this June and then...he took an exam for 'A level',<sup>18</sup> and then he decided 'oh, he doesn't like law any more'. And then he said, because he did so well in the A level and then many universities offered him admission, like UCL [University College London]. Yeah, UCL offered him admission to law school but he said, 'no I don't like law any more and I want to study [to be an] actuary'. ...He applied to UBC too and eventually he chose U of Waterloo. And then he went to U of Waterloo and right now he's in Waterloo.**

*JW: Why choose Waterloo?*

**A: 'Cause Waterloo is prestigious, yes, for math and computer science.**

This interview captured the complex spatial and social relations that can arise through transnational mobility and as a direct consequence of educational strategies; the apparent

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<sup>18</sup> A (advanced) level is the British exam taken at age 18 to determine university entrance.

irrelevance of travel and distance is particularly striking. Other immigrant students, in their own accounts of transnational family arrangements, mirrored Alison's story in significant respects. In what follows, I suggest some alternative experiences of migration that arose through the quest for education in Canada.

Under these circumstances, I have found, a great deal of family *emotional* work is carried out transnationally (Ellis et al. 1996, Hondagneu-Stelo and Avila 1997). This dimension to the immigrant experience may be lost in an account that focuses overwhelmingly on 'strategies':

*JW: Do your parents still go back [to Hong Kong]?*

**Jason: Well my father went back three times, I think, in six years, and the last time was because my grandmother passed away. And for my mum it's also three times, just on vacation - taking care of my cousins. Actually it's her sister that told her to go back and take care of her children. So she actually booked the ticket for her!**

*JW: Why did she need your mum to look after the kids?*

**J: She's just fired her Filipino worker.**

Beverly's extended family is quite dispersed. Her father has two siblings living in Vancouver and her mother has siblings in Edmonton and New Zealand. She has a cousin studying in England. Her grandparents, who now live in Hong Kong, visit Vancouver once a year. She describes her encounter with transnational 'grand-parenting':

**Beverly: Actually my grandmother lived with my aunt [in Vancouver] before I came here...She came here with my aunt to look after her children. So my grandmother had lived here...She came here for a few months to stay and then went back to Hong Kong and then she came here...Many times.**

*JW: Flying back and forth?*

**B: Yes.**

It transpired during the course of the interview that the aunt was herself flying back and forth between Vancouver, Hong Kong, and Mainland China to help her husband with his business. Beverly's uncle has been flying between Asia and Canada for eight years.

Holly describes her experience of the astronaut family:

**Holly: Lately he's [her father] been spending less time here because his partner also immigrated here so my dad has to look after the business a lot more. Whereas before his partner was in Hong Kong and was still there to monitor the business. Now every time my dad comes back he worries about what's going on...He's coming back soon but this is an exceptional case because my mom's having surgery...Normally he's stay there until Christmas.**

*JW: What about yourself? Do you go back?*

**H: The last time I went back was only for a few days because it was the week right before my mid-terms and I had five mid-terms that week. But my god-brother was getting married that week so...**

*JW: Where did people come from?*

**H: I remember sitting there at the table and my god-brother said special thanks to this person who came from this place and this person who came from that place.**

As these few examples have indicated, emotional family work is frequently entwined with the more pragmatic, strategic considerations of the transnational household.

## Immigration, 'segregation' and class

'These strategies of educational choice are, it is believed, indicative of the ways in which Barnsbury's middle-classes have chosen to separate themselves from the 'local community' [...it is] not an area in which they are prepared to take risks.' (Butler 2003, p. 2476)

So far in this chapter I have demonstrated how immigrant students have *perceived* overseas educational opportunities at different spatial scales and how they have then *acted upon* those perceptions through migration and the acquisition of a Canadian education. I have conceptualised 'education' in terms of cultural capital, which accords centrality to social class and to class-based strategies of social reproduction. In the remainder of this chapter I explore the notion that the exercise of 'educational choice' through migration may foster a particular kind of social solidarity amongst immigrant students and suggest how this may illuminate larger conceptual concerns around issues of citizenship, cosmopolitanism and in particular the creation of a 'transnational class'. I do this through an examination of the meaning and function of 'social segregation' among immigrants in the host society.

This argument has two particular strands. Firstly, I consider how the re-creation of a tightly-knit social community overseas – in this case amongst Chinese groups in Vancouver – can ensure the continuity of a pre-migration *habitus*, re-establishing and solidifying particular social values and norms in the new setting. The second and related point concerns immigrant students' experiences of collegiality and friendship in



Vancouver. Emphasising the recent scholarship on the intersection of class, identity and mobility discussed in chapter 4, I consider how my research on 'the overseas education' can contribute to discussions around the creation of a 'transnational capitalist class' (Sklair 2001) and the 'strategic cosmopolitan' (Mitchell 2003).

### **The re-creation of *habitus* and cultural capital**

In relation to the first point, my data suggest that my participants' pre-migration *habitus* (as described in chapter 6) is able to survive, in important respects, the potentially disruptive processes of immigration and resettlement. I want to discuss this with explicit reference to education and educational achievement. Several studies have examined the relationship between large and relatively concentrated immigrant communities (as found in Vancouver) and children's educational success. As James Coleman has argued in his seminal work, 'closed communities' may act as a form of social control, imposing norms and 'effective sanctions' (1988, p.104/105). They may also be conceived as social capital, or what Portes and MacLeod (1996) have termed 'enforceable trust', creating an environment in which particular (positive) expectations about children's educational behaviour are revived and enforced.

Portes and MacLeod (1996) studied over five thousand second-generation high school students in the United States, examining 'the extent to which [...] first-generation patterns of advantage and disadvantage are reproduced in the second generation' (p. 256). The study compared two principal groups: the children of Cuban and Vietnamese immigrants (regarded as relatively 'advantaged') and children of Haitian and Mexican

immigrants (regarded as relatively 'disadvantaged'). They found that 'length of US residence', hours spent on homework, and parental socio-economic status all impacted children's academic performance, but 'did not eliminate the effects of ethnic community'.

For the purpose of this thesis, the most informative data are found in the qualitative accounts of immigrant parents.

'Random samples of approximately 120 foreign-born parents of the respondents were interviewed in Miami and San Diego. These interviews were revealing because they show the consistently different outlooks associated with specific nationalities. In them, the academic success or failure of second-generation youths emerged as almost a self-fulfilling prophecy of their parents' collective attitudes and plans for the future.' (Portes and MacLeod 1996, p. 270)

The Cuban immigrants in Miami, for example, 'tended to exude self-confidence and to view their children's college education not as a dream but as a *fait accompli*' (p. 270). The success of one Vietnamese child in school was linked to 'her family's close ties with other Vietnamese families. They live in an encapsulated world where adults tend to support each other's parenting rules' (p. 271). The authors concluded that, in the cases examined, ethnic community ties were of overriding importance in children's educational experiences. Comparable circumstances may help explain the 'Confucian ethic' that has been frequently linked to the 'extraordinary educational attainment' of Asian Americans (Hirschmann and Wong 1985).

Reflecting a similar set of processes, I would suggest, Hong Kong immigrants in Vancouver have been largely successful in recreating their *habitus* (laying stress upon educational success and particular career aspirations amongst children) through the mutual reinforcement of norms implied by strong social networks, although, on closer

inspection, the picture is somewhat more ambiguous. The following examples taken from interviews suggests a sense of surveillance within a Chinese immigrant group:

**Jill:** You know, this is the thing about Chinese families. They like to compete with each other, like, 'oh my child is going to this da-da-da university or high school'. That's why the rankings are really important. Like which university or high school you go to, that kind of rates what kind of person you are.

*JW: Were your parents involved in the competition between families?*

**J:** They say 'no' but of course yes.

*JW: Where do you think that came from?*

**J:** It's just the culture, just the culture I would say. Even here [in Vancouver], between Chinese families, when you go out they ask 'where are you going to?' And if you say 'college', then they think you're not studying hard enough, but if you are going to university they think 'oh yes!' The competition is everywhere between Chinese people I would say. That's why UBC has the most Asian students....

Mark's mother tried to get him to attend a Kumon maths class but, he told me, he 'resisted':

**Mark:** Most Chinese parents they try to push their kids to the Sunday school and extra tutoring. In Canada, Hong Kong, [the] same thing. Because they have to prepare for that stressful exam and so they have to push their kids too hard. So hard just to make sure they get into the next level.

Holly had a similar experience:

**Holly:** I think her [her mother] intention was that just in case my career at university fails I can go and teach piano to people. I think she also thought that learning piano would help my brain function better. Like she heard that if you listen to a lot of classical music it helps your studying. She's been saying, come on and listen to classical music. I don't know how she comes up with this. After I came here [to Vancouver] it's almost the same thing actually. We had

**swimming lessons and piano lessons. We also had an English tutor. And we also went to the maths centre; at first it was Kumon... They have a few locations.**

*JW: Who was attending these classes?*

**H: Mainly Asians. There were some people from Malaysia and some people from Taiwan.**

Richard's cousins had set the precedent for hard work in Canada. He also found that the students around him (most of whom were from Hong Kong) displayed a strong work ethic:

**Richard: I was really lazy in Hong Kong [...] After I came here my cousins – the ones that came before me – they studied hard and, like, they influenced me. And my friends here: when I went to UBC, they influenced me too.**

Earlier research, however, had alerted me to the fact that in *some* circumstances this habitus can break down, particularly when both parents are absent from the Canadian home as a consequence of transnational family strategising (Waters 2003a). I have also considered, therefore, the *limits* to transnational accumulation strategies and the 'flexible' family form. In the 'satellite kids' circumstance, when children are left alone in Vancouver to accumulate cultural capital through education, parents were frequently unable to maintain the types of control described above from afar. Children would often fail to complete schoolwork and sometime miss school altogether (Waters 2003a), thereby directly undermining accumulation strategies. As Coleman (1988) has written:

'Social capital within the family [...] depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child. The physical absence of adults may be described as a structural deficiency in family social capital

[...] the nuclear family itself, in which one or both parents work outside the home, can be seen as structurally deficient, lacking the social capital that comes with the presence of parents during the day, or with grandparents or aunts and uncles in or near the household.' (p. 111)

Despite its apparent spatial flexibility, the middle-class Chinese family is unable to overcome all socio-spatial constraints.

I also want to consider the social 'embeddedness' (Granovetter 1985) of cultural capital in relation to these forms of social segregation and its critical links to 'place'. Cultural capital, I argue, depends fundamentally upon particular, geographically located social relations for its value, and for the realisation of that value in the labour market. Here, I consider how these critical social relations might be established in the segregated spaces of education and socialisation in Vancouver.

*JW: So you've made a lot of friends here?*

**Jason: Yes I do. Actually they are all Chinese...or they're all Hong Kong people. In Vancouver, especially in Richmond, I think thirty or forty percent of the population are Asian. Yeah. Very high. So, in my six years in Vancouver the only friend I made that's not Chinese is a Russian back when I was in Grade Nine. The only friend I made that's not Chinese! It's kind of funny, huh?**

His account was not uncommon. In fact, *all* of the participants with whom I discussed the issue of friendships indicated that the overwhelming majority of the friends they have made in Vancouver are from the same country of origin.

*JW: Where do most of your friends come from here?*

**Lydia: In Hong Kong, like, in my high school...a lot of my friends were from Hong Kong, like sixty percent...in Richmond. There's a lot of Chinese over**

there. So usually we talk to each other in Chinese and just communicate with each other in Cantonese or Mandarin or something like that.

*JW: Has that changed at UBC?*

**L:** I think [at] UBC it's not really easy to find friends or classmates because when you are in class you talk to each other in class and usually if I don't understand something I will ask someone in Cantonese.

*JW: How is your brother experiencing school?*

**L:** Oh, I think he's really happy. And he's made a lot of friends. In our high school, like, 70 percent are Chinese people, so he's like talking Chinese and stuff.

*JW: How often do you actually speak English to people?*

**L:** Not usually. Only [to] my tutor. Like I listen to the professor and if the TA [teaching assistant] asks a question, but that's about it.

*JW: Are all your friends from Hong Kong?*

**L:** Yes.

This type of social segregation is apparently exacerbated by the fact that Chinese students tend to pursue the same academic subjects at university, leading to a concentration of students from similar backgrounds inside as well as outside of the learning environment. Rees explained that he very rarely spoke English at UBC; areas of Vancouver are like 'little Hong Kongs' but so too are the spaces of the university:

**Rees:** Especially if you are in business administration or engineering, it's like eighty percent Chinese. So there's no way you'll be speaking [English] unless you are the minority speaking English.

Bourdieu's (1996) observations about the effects of the educational institution on students in France have some resonance, it would seem, with the spatial and social experiences of immigrant students in Vancouver:

'[Certain educational institutions] assemble adolescents with many similar social and academic properties and isolate them in a separate space. This selective confinement produces a very homogeneous group whose very homogeneity is further increased through the mutual socialization brought about by continued, prolonged contact...(p. 75)

But most importantly, when the process of social rupture and segregation that takes a set of carefully chosen people and forms them into a separate group is known and recognized as a legitimate form of election, it gives rise in and of itself to symbolic capital that increases with the degree of restriction and exclusivity of the group so established...Thus an extraordinary *concentration of symbolic capital* is effected. (p. 79)

In the next chapter, I will consider the implications of such a 'concentration of symbolic capital', through an examination of the experiences of returnee graduates as they enter the local labour market and attempt to exchange the cultural capital acquired in Canada for economic and social privilege back in Hong Kong.

### **A cosmopolitan sensibility**

The second point that I wish to raise around the issue of 'social segregation' relates to the recent work of two particular scholars, Leslie Sklair (2001) and Katharyne Mitchell (2003), whose research I discussed in chapter 4. To summarise their main arguments here: Sklair (2001) provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding aspects of both the rise of a global education industry and the coterminous increase in education-led migration, through his notion of a 'transnational capitalist class' (TNCC). The TNCC,

which he claims is the main driving force behind contemporary globalisation, comprises of four sub-groups: the corporate executives, 'globalizing professionals', 'globalizing bureaucrats and politicians', and 'consumerist elites'. Together they constitute a 'new class [...pursuing] people and resources all over the world in its insatiable desire for private profit and eternal accumulation' (2001, p.4). Importantly, members of this group are seen to possess similar lifestyles, patterns of consumption, and *educational histories*: 'members of the TNCC seek to project images of themselves as citizens of the world as well as of their places of birth' (p. 21), have 'outward-oriented global rather than inward-oriented local perspectives on most economic, political, and culture-ideology issues' (p. 20), and may experience collegiality through 'an institutional network of schools, clubs, [or] resorts...' (p. 13). There are two main points that I want to raise here in relation to this typology: firstly, that the TNCC, at least within Asia, are largely represented by a population that has been educated 'overseas'. Although Sklair gives far too little attention to the role of education in the creation of the TNCC, he does mention the potential importance of American business schools in teaching a 'transnational [...] outlook' and in having a 'significant impact' on the behaviour and ideology of international executives. He notes that a large proportion of these graduates originate 'from *outside* the USA' (p. 20, emphasis added). Secondly, I would argue that this TNCC is also the driving force behind the globalisation of education. In his discussion of the 'state fraction' of the TNCC, he describes how they are influenced by 'global nationalism' and 'economic neoliberalism' (p. 22) and are responsible, also, for the proliferation of concepts of World Best Practice, universal 'benchmarking' and public partnerships with



private business. These concepts, as I showed in chapter 2, underpin the recent transformation of education through internationalisation.

Equally relevant is Katharyne Mitchell's work on neoliberalism, social reproduction and the creation of new, globally oriented citizens (Mitchell 2003, Mitchell et al. 2004). Along with Marston and Katz (2004), Mitchell has considered the changing conditions of social reproduction in the context of contemporary transnational social spaces, aiming to break down an ongoing conceptual separation of 'production' and 'reproduction' in analyses of capitalism. They proffer an interpretation that:

'is deeper than that suggested by those who speak of the penetration of the life world by the market, and of a different order than earlier feminist writings that made the work of "nonwork" clear. What we are signalling is the interpellation of subjects as *life workers* – the rendering of permanently mobilized bodies in new kinds of technologies of power [...] One of the areas that command our attention in particular is the formation of the "neoliberal subject" in relation to the current regime of accumulation and in relation to the state [...] The devolution of more and more "choice" to a seemingly ever more autonomous individual who must rationally calculate the benefits and costs of all aspects of life [...] is part of a much broader set of practices that tend to increase productivity for the employer while reducing the responsibility of both the employer and the state in managing and sustaining the reproduction of labor-power [...] But the economic devolution associated with neoliberalism is the perfect expression of contemporary capitalist ideology, which brings the logic of the rational market to all aspects of life and in so doing redefines the nexus of the economic and the social.' (Mitchell et al. 2004, pp. 3 – 4)

In relation to my own thesis, I would stress the apparently inter-relationship between the creation of new social subjectivities imbued with an appreciation of the importance of 'choice' and the freedom of 'the market' and the maintenance and penetration of a global neoliberal (and educational) agenda. Focussing more specifically upon education, Mitchell (2003) has demonstrated the implications of her argument by showing the ways

in which neoliberal ideology has transformed classroom pedagogy. In the US, Canada and England neoliberalism has changed the meaning of 'multiculturalism' within the school curriculum and directed it towards a more economically strategic 'internationalism':

'Recent changes in the philosophy and practice of national education systems have taken many forms, but my focus in this paper will be on the shifting discourse of multiculturalism and on the growing pressures for greater educational standardization and accountability. In multicultural education there has been a subtle but intensifying move away from person-centred education for all [...] towards a more individuated, mobile, and highly tracked skills-based education, or the creation of the "strategic cosmopolitan." The "multicultural self" was one who was able to work with and through difference, and conditioned to believe in the positive advantages of diversity on constructing and unifying the nation. The "strategic cosmopolitan" is, by contrast, motivated not by ideals of national unity in diversity, but by understandings of global competitiveness, and the necessity to strategically adapt as an individual to rapidly shifting personal and national contexts.' (2003, p. 387/388)

Although only implicit in her remarks, I would suggest that her argument highlights the impact of *immigrant and international students* upon the education systems of these countries; schools are now more geared towards fulfilling the demands of transnational, globally oriented parents, in line with more general pressures to 'internationalise' both curricula and the student body.

Both of these examples suggest the emergence of a new 'class' of transnational graduates, whether defined as a 'transnational capitalist class' or 'strategic cosmopolitans', placed in relation to new modes of capital accumulation. These graduates are concerned with global rather than national issues, and are perceived as disconnected from their local community. Their citizenship is often strategic, in line with Ong's (1999)

notion of the 'flexible citizen' (see also Waters 2003a, 2003b). And, most importantly, as a class they are united through a similar educational experience.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It will be interesting to observe the extent to which 'distance learning' programmes, and especially the new forms of internet-based learning such as Universitas Global 21, bestow the same type of cultural capital on its graduates. Are the places and spaces of learning important in the conferment of value?

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **MIGRATION AND SOCIAL ALCHEMY: GEOGRAPHIES OF CULTURAL CAPITAL AND THE EMBEDDED VALUE OF CREDENTIALS**

‘If you, like most students, think that the most important factor in getting a job is good grades, you are wrong. That’s not to say that qualifications don’t count, but they are not the deciding factor’ (Whitehead 2002a, *South China Morning Post*)

In chapter 7, I examined the specific spatial strategies enlisted by middle-class Chinese families, as they sought to accumulate different forms of capital at different global sites. It focused on the acquisition of cultural capital, accomplished principally through the children’s schooling in Vancouver. Drawing on the typology proposed by Bourdieu (1986), I demonstrated how cultural capital was both ‘institutionalised’ in academic credentials and ‘embodied’ in the more general experiences of migration and acculturation. This chapter discusses a further stage in the process of family strategising, capital accumulation and social reproduction. It examines the means by which cultural capital, embedded in specific places and social relations, becomes *actualised* through the labour market.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the empirical data, a couple of caveats need to be mentioned. The first concerns the move back to Hong Kong. In this thesis, I suggest that mobility is an integral component of the overall strategy of capital accumulation. I argue that families have always understood the *geography* of cultural capital – it was planned from the outset that the children would return to Asia following their graduation, where their ‘Western’ education would be at its most valuable. Some of the children, of

course, decide to stay in Canada.<sup>1</sup> The thesis is thereby limited in that it examines the value of this education only for those who return to Hong Kong. Secondly, my analysis considers cultural capital in relation to a very narrow range of careers, limited by the employment experiences of my small sample of graduate returnees (23). My sample fits very well the career profiles of the large database of Hong Kong-UBC alumni (a data set of 1000, see Introduction to Section Two). However, I am unable to comment on the value of the Canadian education for a broader range of careers and it is of course possible that a local education may be more highly valued in certain other job sectors.

So what does this chapter show? For one, it continues the work of previous chapters in demonstrating some of the reasons for and implications of the family strategies examined in this thesis. From parents' initial investment in children's education, through migration and graduation, this chapter focuses upon students' transition into the labour market, and the consequent social reproduction of family class status. In particular, the chapter reveals the social and spatial mechanisms underpinning the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital. It emphasises the *embeddedness* of these ostensibly 'mobile' processes - the ways in which the recognition of cultural capital is profoundly rooted in specific social relations, concentrated in space, and not free floating, as some descriptions of Chinese cosmopolitans would imply (Ong and Nonini 1997, Ong 1999, Hamilton 1999). In addition, my findings speak to several key features of a recent literature examining the social embeddedness of economic behaviour within firms (Granovetter 1985, Beaverstock 1996, McDowell 1997, Thrift 2000, Amin 2003, Gertler 2003, McDowell 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> There are no available official statistics indicating how many immigrants remain in Canada and how many leave. As I have shown, many move back and forth throughout their lives (see also Ley and Kobayashi 2002 for some fascinating descriptions of circular mobility).

The thesis makes a theoretical contribution to understanding how cultural capital is appraised in practice. An important component of this chapter thereby involves a discussion of *social capital* (Bourdieu 1986, Lin 2001) and an empirical demonstration of the significance of this form of capital in the recognition and valuation of cultural capital. Social relations (constituting the basis of social capital) have to be constantly renewed and sustained. In addition, cultural capital is never sufficient but, in response to a dynamic social and cultural environment, has to be continuously upgraded. My participants indicate, in their own words, the ways in which they develop both their cultural capital and social capital in Hong Kong. This chapter begins, however, with a short discussion of the class strategies underpinning the educational patterns and practices described in these pages.

### **Cultural capital, class and the labour market**

This section constitutes an extension of earlier chapters, examining the intersection of class strategies and cultural capital. Here I focus, briefly, on the point at which cultural capital is converted into economic capital (the transition from student to employee) and the class dynamics of this conversion. I want to make two principal points. Firstly, it is necessary to stress the importance of *subjectivity* in the evaluation of credentials. According to Pierre Bourdieu and several other commentators, credential recognition is a key means by which particular social groups are able to maintain the boundaries of class privilege, at a time when *access* to education is increasingly universal and the relative value of middle-class educational ‘achievements’ diminished. In this vein, Bourdieu has written:

‘The value objectively and subjectively placed on the academic qualification is in fact defined only by the totality of the social uses that can be made of it. Thus the evaluation of diplomas by the closest peer groups, such as relatives, neighbours, fellow students (one’s ‘class’ or ‘year’) and colleagues, can play an important role in masking the effects of devaluation. These phenomena of individual and collective misrecognition are in no way illusory, since they can orient real practices, especially the individual and collective strategies aimed at establishing or re-establishing the objective reality of the value of the qualification or position; and these strategies can make a real contribution toward actual revaluation’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 143)

If we accept this argument, then it follows that the value of educational credentials resides in the particular networks (or ‘social fields’) of mutual recognition in which they are embedded. I will go on to illustrate this point through the data, showing that the value ascribed to my participants’ credentials depended, at least in part, upon their membership of an exclusive network of social relations and that this membership facilitated their transition into the labour market.

This observation ties in closely to my next point, concerning the relationship between social class, cultural groups and occupations. According to Collins (1979), the rise of education as a form of social differentiation reflects the process by which ‘*Cultures of specific groups* were gradually transformed into abstract credentials’ (1979, pp. 93/94, emphasis added). In a similar vein, Bourdieu (1984) has argued that ‘it is written into the tacit definition of the academic qualification *formally* guaranteeing a specific competence (like an engineering diploma) that it *really* guarantees possession of a ‘general culture’...’ (p. 25). As academic qualifications become increasingly widespread, so occupational *specialisation* ensures that cultural differentiation is maintained. According to Collins (1979), specialised occupations are really class-based occupations. He writes, ‘cultural organization shapes the class struggle at one of its most crucial points: the

formation of various degrees of property in the form of occupational ‘positions’” (p. 172). In addition, ‘Specialized occupational groups come increasingly into possession of resources for monopolizing positions for their own local advantage’ (p. 72). Taking this argument one step further, the educational background of a job candidate may be used as a proxy for specific *class traits* in the selection process. In an analysis of a survey of 240 employers in Connecticut and North Carolina, it was concluded that employers regarded education as a screening device for employees with desirable (i.e. middle-class) character and demeanour (Noland and Bakke 1949, referenced in Collins 1979).

The link between the cultural capital, social group membership and specific career trajectories was suggested in my data. My participants pursued a narrow range of academic subjects at university and now work in a fairly narrow range of jobs (see Introduction to Section Two for a complete description). Seven out of 23 went into banking, 4 into management, and 2 into auditing and accounting. I will show that, within these particular occupations, the Canadian university degree is perceived to symbolise the possession of a ‘general culture’ by its holder. I agree wholeheartedly with Collins and argue that my participants displayed the distinctive traits of a *cultural group*, which directed them into these particular occupations (occupations that value their cultural capital).<sup>2</sup> This thesis attempts to define this ‘general culture’ (Bourdieu 1984) by rendering cultural capital in its most substantial facets.

### **How failure is turned to gold**

‘How did the indirect route become the royal route...?’ (Bourdieu 1996, p. 200)

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<sup>2</sup> I can only surmise that the value of their cultural capital in other professional spheres may differ.



'I don't think that I would have had a chance to go to university there [Hong Kong] because it's really competitive. High school here [Vancouver] is pretty relaxing. You don't really do much and you pass everything.' (*Michael, Vancouver Interview, 2002*)

I return now to the central question that has framed this inquiry from the outset; I have sought to establish the principal reasons why, as described by Ong (1999), a 'Western education' signifies the 'ultimate symbolic capital' (p. 90) for middle-class Chinese families. In certain contexts, the symbolic capital of an overseas education may rest with the profound inadequacies of local educational provision; Basch et al. (1994) have argued that in particular Caribbean communities, transnational educational projects, whereby a child is sent overseas for some of all of their post-secondary schooling, are the only means of ensuring education beyond the most basic level. However, such an argument cannot be made for Hong Kong, where, as I described in chapter 6, educational provision has expanded significantly since the 1970s, to the point where nine years of free public education is guaranteed (Education Department 2002).<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Hong Kong education system, participants told me, was relatively 'tough' and not just because it required constant hard work. As I have shown, many expected to fail in the system had they remained in Hong Kong.

In chapter 7, I examined the issue of 'failure' and demonstrated how the timing of a family's emigration was frequently related to certain crucial stages in their child's schooling. Here I focus on the other side of the story – an example of what Bourdieu

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<sup>3</sup> Although I do not have the data to support an assertion, it is interesting to speculate on the symbolic power of *mobility*, in and of itself, to confer status upon an education. In Stafford's study of education in Taiwan, parents went to considerable financial expense to send their children to study outside the locality (Stafford 1995). In some accounts, simply having a family member 'studying overseas' would seem to confer status, regardless of the specific nature of that study or of the student's 'success'.

has called 'social alchemy'.<sup>4</sup> I address directly the mechanisms by which the 'overseas degree' is transformed into something far more valuable than a 'local degree' as immigrant graduates return to Hong Kong.

I have identified two principal explanations for the widespread belief that a Western education is invariably superior to anything attainable in Hong Kong. The first lies in the conviction that the Asian and North American education systems are fundamentally different and that this difference, symbolised ultimately in the degree certificate, will have a direct bearing upon a child's access to desirable employment in Hong Kong. Essentially, the two systems are thought to cultivate distinctive skills and, through their respective assessment procedures, measure very different attributes. Employers in *Hong Kong* are believed to value the skills associated with a North American education above those attainable in Asia. It is this belief that drives parents and children to seek an overseas education, addressing also the tendency amongst immigrant students to *return* after graduation. The second explanation lies with the significance of social connections and interpersonal relations in the process of converting cultural capital into economic capital in the labour market. Put simply, existing scholarship on cultural capital frequently overlooks the necessity of specific, geographically embedded social capital for its recognition and valuation. I will show how graduate returnees use social relationships to help them get jobs and advance their careers. Both of these explanations reflect spatial variations in cultural capital, in terms of its acquisition and its exchange.

Before proceeding with this discussion, I want to provide some examples of 'typical responses' to interview questions, highlighting a notable (if unsurprising) difference

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu uses 'social alchemy' in a different but related context to the way in which I use it here. He uses the term to describe a more general process by which credentials become indicators of 'natural' ability and, thereby, a hard and fast means of stratifying populations in society.

between current students and graduate returnees in respect of their family strategies. Whilst the returnees were able to articulate the rationality underpinning various migration-related decisions,<sup>5</sup> current immigrant students were much more vague. To exemplify a frequent response, here are a few extracts taken from interviews with students in Vancouver. A number of themes can be identified:

*JW: Why did your parents think it [the Canadian education] was better?*

**Kelly: I think they wanted me to learn English better.**

*JW: Why?*

**K: They have something in mind that if you study abroad and then you go back to Hong Kong they [employers] will hire you...They would rather hire someone from abroad than the ones from local universities.**

*JW: Do you have any idea why?*

**K: I have no idea why. I think that all the Hong Kong people have the same thing in mind.**

*JW: Is it anywhere overseas or certain countries?*

**K: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and England.**

*JW: Why those countries?*

**K: I think because they're English speaking.**

Kelly demonstrates how the considerations of employers were very often taken into account in the process of rationalising the move to Canada. Carrie was asked to explain why her parents made the decision to emigrate:

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<sup>5</sup> Post hoc rationalising along with the maturation of students over time are no doubt important in some cases. Perhaps this also reflects the overpowering influence of their parents in the initial migration decision. Children were rarely consulted for their opinion.

**Carrie:** I don't know. I think my dad wanted my sister and I to have a better education.

*JW:* So can you explain that to me? What is better about the education here?

**C:** What is better?... Well, let's say we are in Hong Kong...People in Hong Kong, they don't really speak English. And even if they do it's not really fluent. But if I come here and study, right, I know my English level will improve. You know, comparing UBC and Hong Kong university, right? UBC is much more well known.

*JW:* In Hong Kong?

**C:** In general, internationally wise. So that's why...so even if I apply for a job and I say I am a UBC graduate, I think they'll hire me over a Hong Kong U graduate.

*JW:* Does that apply for all universities outside Hong Kong or specific countries?

**C:** Well I think universities from England, US and Canada. They override universities in Hong Kong.

Carrie highlights the importance of possessing cultural capital of *international* value, through the acquisition of a degree from a university from an English-speaking country. Susie's mother had thought she would get a better education in Canada than in Hong Kong. I asked her to explain why:

**Susie:** I don't know! Ahh...I think a big part of the reason was the 1997, Hong Kong going back to China thing...because people were unsure of the future they would rather play safe and get to a place where they think nothing is going to go wrong. I think that was like the big part of the reason as well. Canada generally had a really good reputation...I think in general, like, foreign countries like Australia and Canada and the US. People assumed that you could get good education in these places...

*JW:* Why?

**S:** I don't know, I don't know. I think it's just this...rumour...

*JW: How much knowledge is attached to it do you think? How much information have people got?*

**S: Yeah, umm...of course I think that part of it is [that] immigrants that came to Canada and had their kids finish part of their education here would go back [to Hong Kong] and - I don't know - maybe they bragged about how good the education was [...] I think part of it is getting the language too. Maybe like, by immigrating to a foreign place, well this is just my guess but, even in Australia then you can practice your English...Like knowing that you've got good English is pretty important.**

'Bragging' by returnees is one social practice by which the mystical status of the overseas education is sustained. I asked Justin if he believed that a Canadian degree would bring any advantages when looking for a job back in Hong Kong:

**Justin: Umm...When you go back, people will hire you as they will see you as a foreigner - as a foreign student. Smarter.**

*JW: Why?*

**J: I don't know why but...they just feel that. That's why if you study here it's better than back in Hong Kong.**

*JW: Was that, maybe, a consideration of your parents as well?*

**J: Yeah, definitely. 'Cause people in Hong Kong do think that way. I don't know why, but they do think that way. I think that's one of the reasons why my parents wanted us to come here and study.**

In one final example, Hannah highlights the potency of the sometimes vague belief in the superiority of the overseas degree. I asked:

*JW: What is so special about an overseas education?*

**Hannah: I think the Chinese people have stereotypes. They think that people who go to foreign countries to study, they always learn more than in their country. So maybe employers will hire students from the foreign countries more than their own students.**

The power of stereotypes and 'vague notions' to direct migration behaviour should not be underestimated, I would suggest, at least within this context.

### **Modes of assessment and types of skills**

'The 'rules of entry' and the 'rules of the game' [have] become increasingly personalised. The distinction between the 'official' and the 'person' is weakened in the work situation, leading to the exposure of the 'whole' person in the assessment of adequate performance [...] Moreover, the greater the emphasis on normative control, the greater the demand for recruits to exhibit strong cultural affiliation to colleagues and the organisation' (Brown 1995, p. 41).

'...creating and managing knowledge is a major corporate challenge, because knowledge often lies outside of the control of the firm, and is intangible, sticky, recursive, and difficult to transmit or generalize' (Amin 2003, p. 117).

I turn now to address the first substantive explanation for the value of the Canadian education in the context of Hong Kong. It is widely believed that fundamental differences between the two education systems exist; education in Canada and education in Hong Kong are differentiated by more than just location. Of central importance is the prevailing perception that *the two systems cultivate and measure very distinctive skills*, and that *those developed through the Canadian system are those most coveted by employers in Hong Kong*.<sup>6</sup> One participant, Natalie, articulated this idea in detail, capturing brilliantly the more general tenor of my interviews with graduates in Hong Kong. Natalie entered Canada in 1990 on a student visa, as she was about to finish Hong Kong Secondary 4 (the year before the HKCEE). She went on to study statistics at UBC, and now works as a

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<sup>6</sup> It was interesting to observe that participants made reference to the perception of prospective employers on many occasions. Meeting the needs of employers, it would seem, underlay the strategies of parents from an early stage in the planning process.

Human Resources consultant for a large global consulting firm in Hong Kong. This particular company (like most encountered through this research) is transnational, with offices in 30 countries, including 6 in Canada, 9 in the UK, and 30 in the US. It was formed in 1995 when two firms – one American, one British - merged. Natalie has family living in Hong Kong, the US, Australia and Malaysia, as well as Canada. Her position as a Human Resources consultant gives her a particular insight into the processes involved in evaluating credentials. She revealed her understanding of the socially constructed nature of examination systems, and the subjective evaluation inherent in different types of measurement. The following extract begins with her critique of the methods of teaching practiced in Hong Kong.

**Natalie: Those subjects [taught in Hong Kong] do not concentrate on your communication skills; they do not concentrate on your English skills. What they concentrate on is how much do you remember. So I really hate that kind of test. That's *meaningless*, because I do not really exercise my logical thinking. I do not give any judgment. You know, some of those questions would ask you, 'in that article what did the author say?', things like that. 'Why did he say that?' That has standard answers. In Hong Kong we just buy the standard book where you have the simulated examination questions and answers, and then you just 'by heart' everything. You put everything in your memory, and then it's like playing a machine. When you see this then, OK, 'ding' this is the answer. You have it by heart and write it...It was quite difficult because I don't have a good memory and I don't like to 'by heart' things, and I think that's not my way of doing things. Because I think if you take the time to memorize it you've not really analysed it. (Emphasis added)**

She highlights two particular shortcomings of the Hong Kong system frequently stressed in interviews. The first is the lack of English conversation; when English is taught, it is taught 'by the book', and there are consequently very few opportunities available to practice speaking. In contrast, migration to Vancouver forces students into a predominantly English-speaking environment. Their education is delivered in English;

schools and universities demand a certain level of regular communication in the language. Natalie also discusses the emphasis on rote learning in Hong Kong ( see *Time Magazine* 2002). You just buy the standard textbook and learn the answers. Her analogy of a machine is particularly illustrative of a more generally feeling amongst both parents and students. Rote learning, Natalie argues, prevents the development of analytical skills, and stifles creativity. I asked her whether her UBC degree gave her an advantage when seeking work in Hong Kong.

**Natalie: I guess it does. Because at first, OK, firstly when HR managers or when the managers want to hire somebody – a fresh graduate – when they look at the CV, if you have a foreign country education that will give you a plus. Why? Because in Hong Kong the English level is not high. People are not practicing their English speaking, they concentrate on their writing skills etc., and the education system in Hong Kong does not really encourage students to think and broaden their sense and things like that.**

Interviews with the managers of multi-national corporations in Hong Kong supported Natalie's claims. With the help of a research assistant, structured interviews were conducted with 5 managers of different multinational firms in Hong Kong, all in the financial services sector. One manager claimed that 85 to 90 percent of the firm's new recruits were graduates from overseas, asserting: 'because of the nature of our business, nearly all associates of our firm received their tertiary education abroad'. This firm has several employees from the same university; the examples he gave were City University of New York and Yale. Another manager claimed that 70 percent of employees received their education overseas. He said:

**Because this is a multi-national firm, our employees need to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, so we look for somebody with good communication skills [...] Our clients come from all over the world so we need**



**our employees with good English [and a] wide vision. That's why I think overseas graduates are more qualified.**

He also added that local graduates tended to be 'hard-working with better Putonghua [Mandarin]'. A third firm, with 'over 60 percent' of employees from overseas, suggested that 'overseas graduates are more open-minded, flexible and sociable':

**The education system in Hong Kong is too "spoon-feeding". It limits the development of Hong Kong students. As a result, Hong Kong students lack flexibility and a creative mind. They just know the knowledge from books which makes them narrow-minded.**

The fourth firm surveyed has 'less than 40 percent' of employees with an overseas higher education. This manager said: 'overseas graduates tend to be more supremely self-confident but it might not be an advantage serving local corporate [sic.]. Their education background has a cultural difference with the local economy.' And finally, the fifth firm has only 'around 20 percent' of overseas graduates on staff; the manager suggested that whilst overseas graduates were 'somehow smarter' and 'more efficient' workers than local graduates, the differences tended to disappear over time on the job. All five managers expressed the general opinion that overseas-educated graduates have more valuable qualities than the locally educated within the multi-national firm – an opinion evident from my interviews with overseas graduates. The reasons for, and nature of this advantage are the concern of this chapter.

An area of recent scholarship speaks directly to the issues raised during these interviews, shedding some light on the constituents of valuable cultural capital. This literature examines the importance of new kinds of work-place skills and 'embodied

performances', within the contemporary knowledge economy. According to Dicken (2003), as technological and organizational developments change the nature of work in financial service industries, so the definition of desirable work-place skills is also thereby transformed. He describes 'the emergence of a new matrix of competences' (p. 445), and I present a few of his examples here. Notice, as this chapter progresses, the similarity between these competences and my participants' perception of their own cultural capital.

**Table 8.1**

<b>Old Competencies</b>	<b>New Competencies</b>
Capacity to deal with repetitive, straightforward and concrete work process	Capacity to deal with non-routine and abstract work process
Ability to operate in a supervised work environment	Ability to handle decisions and responsibilities
Isolated work	Group work, interactive work

Source: Based on Dicken (2003, p. 445)

Emergent work-place skills involve a greater degree of subtlety and flexibility on the part of both employers and employees. These are described by Thrift (2000) as a 'new style of doing business'. He writes:

'What we can see is a new set of embodied resources being brought into the world for capitalist firms to operate on and with, resources that might well prove to be on a par with, say, the invention of bookkeeping, filing, or various means of production management.' (pp. 687 - 688)

Desirable 'embodied resources' reflect very up-to-the-minute demands of the economy:

‘firms now live in a permanent state of emergency, always bordering on the edge of chaos, and no longer concerned to exercise bureaucratic control. Indeed, through a variety of devices – cultivating knowledge workers, valuing teams, organizing through projects, making better use of information technology, and flattening hierarchies – they will generate just enough organizational stability to change in an orderly fashion while maintaining hair-trigger responsiveness to adapt to the expectedly unexpected.’ (2000, p. 674)

‘In turn, this increasing pressure to innovate has led to a much greater emphasis on *creativity*. [...] Of course, innovation has always been an important part of business organisation’s practice and self-image. But what we now see is much greater attention being paid to fostering the powers of creativity that will lead to innovation, most particularly through models that eschew the black-boxed model of information processing in favour of what von Krogh and Roos (1995, 1998) call “creative” knowledge. Thus, creativity becomes a value *in itself*.” (2000, p. 676, emphasis in original)

In chapter 5, I discussed the importance of embodied cultural capital, associated with the cultivation, through migration and education, of a whole host of skills and social/cultural competences. My participants were in fact highly attuned to the *market value* of such ‘resources’ in the financial services industry (generally the industry of choice). Thrift’s description of desirable work-place skills is uncannily similar to the descriptions given by my participants, when asked to express the virtues of the Canadian education system over that of Hong Kong. Canada’s education is perceived, above all, to foster creativity in its students, in stark contrast to the majority of Asian education systems where rote learning and cramming are the norm. These ideas are epitomised in the following interview extracts. Kevin describes what he likes about schooling in Canada:

**Kevin: It’s free. It’s more of your own style here. There is more room for creativity here, whereas in Hong Kong every student is basically the same personality. They just study, and they are not studying for their interest, they are just studying for the exam. Just to get the high marks.**

I asked Helena to explain why she perceives the Canadian education system as superior to Hong Kong's:

**Helena:** Umm...I guess people think more openly. And to me, most of my friends in Hong Kong, they study hard, but all they do is memorise their stuff. Bang, bang, bang. OK you memorise that and do the exam and you're done. But here it's like more projects and research. You get to know the stuff by yourself. You find the stuff by yourself. So you memorise it more easily and you know how to work with [different situations]. It's not like black white, black white stuff. It changes.

Mark, a fourth year economics student at UBC, captures the general tenor of participants' criticisms of education in Hong Kong.

**Mark:** They [parents] think that the education system in Hong Kong is not good. It's basically all theory, not practical.

*JW: Do employers prefer a more applied approach to education?*

**M:** Yes I think so. You understand things better than if you memorise. If you memorise something then you forget one day. If you apply, you know how to do it, you can just use the same theory on other things too...To me, I think the Hong Kong education system is more like the British education system...We have to do a lot of math. We are told how to do the math. They show us how to do it, but actually it's not practical. And for English education as well. We have to learn English in Hong Kong, right? But mostly we only practice writing and grammar instead of speaking.

There is, then, an embodied performance involved in both getting, and keeping a job (Thrift 2000). Natalie here describes the difference between two *types* of job candidate, depicting a commonly held view that local graduates suffer a mild form of discrimination as a result of various negative stereotypes, under these circumstances:

**Natalie:** And I guess that some of the managers or HR, they find that people that come back from the outside countries are more outgoing and they have

**better communication skills. They are not afraid of expressing themselves. These are the good qualities that they are looking for. They don't want to hire a fresh graduate where they cannot speak English in front of the clients, even to get some information. Sometimes they [local graduates] are a bit introverted – they think of a lot of things but they won't tell you. In a Western style, it's sort of like, you have to stand up for yourself and express yourself and things like that.**

**And also when they conduct the interview they will test your English level, so some of the Hong Kong graduates were stuck. It's not that they don't know how to answer, it's that they don't know how to express themselves because they don't have the practicing experience. Of course, some of the local grads are also very bright and they will get a job, but they may feel that the perception of them is unfair.**

Just as the overseas graduate may be stereotypically perceived as more competent at certain work-related tasks, so the local graduate has to confront various negative perceptions about his/her qualities.

Beaverstock's (1996) analysis of the international banking industry provides some further insight into these issues. He considers a general preference for expatriate labour within these firms and examines this through a case study of two banks (one of which has offices in Hong Kong). He concludes that expatriate labour embodies the 'human capital' necessary for successful banking in the new, knowledge-driven economy. He writes:

'It is now time to acknowledge that the globalisation of human capital is an important process in providing the knowledge necessary for the accumulation of capital in the world economy, particularly within the global-city hierarchy' (p. 459).

I would suggest that his argument is not about human capital, but in fact refers to cultural capital. He refers not to credentials but (implicitly) to a range of tangible and intangible attributes that make expatriate workers a particularly valuable form of embodied resource for international banking firms. A very similar argument could be made, I suggest, for

explaining the preference for overseas graduates within certain global financial offices in Hong Kong. Beaverstock continues: 'expatriate labour is not only about the transfer of knowledge over time and space, but is also about embedding labour into localised business activities and, more importantly, social relations through personal contacts and networks' (p. 468). In Hong Kong, the overseas educated have the triple advantage of embodying various 'cosmopolitan' traits, of being tied into particular transnational social networks and of being locally embedded. As I will demonstrate, participants have the *local knowledge* that comes from being born in Hong Kong, and from continuous transnational exchanges with friends and family when in Canada. They are, as Mitchell describes, 'cultural bridges' between an Eastern culture and Western-style capitalism (1997b).

There are several further points of interest arising from Beaverstock's analysis. One is that entry into investment banking (in Great Britain) is 'tightly regulated through institutions recruiting primarily from Oxford and Cambridge Universities'. McDowell (1997) found a similar pattern in her study of London-based banks. Her interviews with senior members of the personnel department in three banks were particularly revealing. One interviewee said: 'frankly, it's not cost-effective to visit every university in the country...so decisions were made on prejudices to visit Cambridge and Oxford, not the rest' (p. 128). Said McDowell (1997): 'my interviewee made it brutally clear that a 'good' university background outweighed other factors' (p. 128). Of her sample of 50 professional employees, almost half had degrees from only seven universities in the UK. She goes on to discuss the 'importance of 'fit'', explaining that 'All the banks emphasised that they were looking for *more than educational credentials* in prospective

recruits ' (p. 129, emphasis added). 'In all three banks', she concludes, 'it was clear that recruitment procedures tended towards what might be termed 'informal' practices. Indeed, some of the people whom I interviewed in detail had been recruited by 'chance', through personal contacts, through exchange with a more senior person, and so on. It has been argued that more flexible methods of recruitment with an emphasis on personal characteristics – the 'fit' that is so important in banking – are becoming more common [...] in the 1990s' (131).

The majority of my research participants have used informal social networks at some stage of job seeking. I would argue, however, that this was far from 'chance'. My participants, and their parents before them, are savvy to these factors – the importance of cultural capital and social networks in recruitment - and their whole lives have been planned accordingly.

### **Education, cultural groups and 'communities of practice'**

It is only in the last ten years that research on large, multi-national corporations has considered knowledge *per se* to be a source of competitive advantage. For Amin (2003), the new 'learning economy' has spawned 'a whole new ecology of knowledge'. Conceptions of what are considered to be 'valid knowledge' have been transformed:

'This spectrum calls into play a broad set of capabilities, from scientific knowledge and technical know-how and the education, skills and experience to apply and transmit them, to the social capital in inter-personal and inter-firm networks that provides the shared culture for learning in doing.' (p.116)

New research on the economic geography of firms has suggested the importance of shared cultural understandings within the work-place setting (Amin 2003, Gertler 2003).

Examining the 'real world of practice within the global firm', Meric Gertler (2003) discusses the nature of knowledge transfer within organizations for which 'knowledge' is a primary resource. He underlines what is now a common theme in research on the geography of large, international firms, namely the ongoing importance of face-to-face interaction in circumstances where technology can ostensibly enable communication at a distance. The importance of interpersonal relations within firms is discussed in relation to a recent literature on 'the central role of 'communities of practice' (p. 107): 'defined as groups of workers informally bound together by shared experience, expertise, and commitment to a joint enterprise' (ibid.) and perceived to drive knowledge-processing activities.

Gertler argues that the sharing of tacit knowledge is as important as the explicit exchange of 'data' and that this 'depends on institutional proximity – that is, the shared norms, conventions, values, expectations and routines arising from commonly experienced frameworks of institutions [...]' (2003, p. 108). Amin (2003) discusses the 'knowledge-based' approach to the firm, again emphasizing the importance of tacit knowledge. He writes:

'My aim [...] is to edge the knowledge-based perspective towards an acknowledgement of weakly cognitive practices, or more accurately, knowing through the habits of everyday interaction [...] I wish to draw on an anthropological sensibility – largely absent in evolutionary and cognitive thought – on the generation of meaning and novelty through acts of distributed 'communities of practice'. These communities act as performative spaces for both routine and strategic learning based on sociality, mobilizing tacit and codified knowledge in an indivisible continuum.' (p. 115)

What are the implications of these observations for this thesis? For one, they provide some insight into the forms valuable cultural capital can take in the contemporary



international firm. Employers seek, in potential recruits, the capacity to generate knowledge through creativity and also to transmit knowledge through good communication skills. Communication skills between employees are enhanced when they belong to the same cultural group (with a similar educational and social background). Members of the 'overseas educated club' are thought to possess ('naturally') all of these qualities in abundance.

But there is a further point regarding the sociology of hiring, which involves the importance of *cultural affinities between employees and his/her boss*. As Goldthorpe (1996) here explains:

'Employers may be influenced by education because they believe it to be indicative not just of knowledge or skill but also of social and cultural background and lifestyle, with which they may be concerned for more than reasons of organizational performance. For example, senior executives may simply find it congenial to recruit new colleagues who, in background and lifestyle, are as similar as possible to themselves.' (Goldthorpe 1997, p. 667)

These tendencies were implicit in my data. I will return to this important issue later in the chapter, when I discuss the pivotal role of social capital in the recognition and valuation of cultural capital.

### **Hiring practices in Hong Kong firms**

The archives of the *South China Morning Post* tell a particular, fascinating story about local perceptions of overseas education. The following extract epitomises the general tenor of this reporting:

'IT'S LATE SEPTEMBER and suddenly you find yourself having more farewell dinners and trips to the airport than usual. Yes, it's that time of the year again when

some of your former classmates and best friends are leaving Hong Kong in droves to pursue their studies abroad.

According to the Education Department, more than 20,000 local teenagers went to study overseas last year and the number is rising steadily. The most popular destinations are the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, or, less popular, Ireland, South Africa and Europe.

There are many reasons why students are abandoning their kaleidoscopic lifestyle in Hong Kong for an often lacklustre one abroad. Migration is one. Others believe they may receive a better education overseas. Some go abroad simply to 'escape' taking the Hong Kong Certificate Education Examination or the Advanced Level Examination. So despite high tuition fees, which can be as expensive as \$130,000 a year, studying away from Hong Kong is a popular option. However, will overseas-educated students who intend to return to the SAR in the future fare better than their local counterparts in terms of employment prospects?

'It is true that many employers prefer overseas graduates to locals, especially for jobs that deal with people, like marketing, insurance, human resources or public relations,' said a personnel consultant at a local employment agency who declined to be named.

'[That is] because overseas graduates are often considered to have higher English standards and better communication skills. This may or may not be true, but it is the common thinking among many employers that I have talked to,' she said.

The consultant believes overseas graduates will continue to have a winning edge over local students as the economy shifts towards the service industry. Even some university students in Hong Kong would prefer an overseas degree to a local one. Though their reasons vary, many of them share the view that a foreign university can often offer a wider variety of subjects and, above all, can broaden one's horizons.

'I observe with dismay that our universities and students are under the insidious influence of the business economy, which is continually on the lookout for nothing but money and short-term profits,' said Daniel Tam Ka-nam, a second year student at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

'What many students are concerned about is either when they can buy their own flat or how much they can make out of investments. Can't life be more interesting?' The 21-year-old said it would be unfair to generalise and compare locally and overseas-educated students. 'But studying in another country can definitely make you a more independent person, and it can also help build a more rounded personality,' he said.' (Lee 2001, *SCMP Archive*)

This article highlights a number of issues pertinent to this research. It underlines the large-scale geography of overseas education, describing the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand as the preferred student destinations. It supports my findings that, for some students, emigration is a way to 'escape' the two, crucial and decisive school examinations. It points to the exclusive social class dynamics of most of this mobility – the prohibitive expense incurred by some students, and the subsequent improved job prospects of those same students when they return to Hong Kong in particular (financial) sectors of the labour market. These students, it claims, will acquire particular desirable and marketable skills (regardless of their 'achievement'). And finally, the article raises an issue that I will consider towards the end of this thesis, regarding the personal horizons of the overseas graduate.

Searching through the archives, I found several recent articles that portray the figurative 'overseas education' in a similar light, almost invariably devaluing the 'local education' in the process. Here I will present a few, pertinent examples. In an article explicitly promoting study in Australia was an interview with the Director of the Australian Education Centre in Hong Kong (which is sponsored by the Australian government):

"Australia was a favoured option for those students who want the experience of living and studying in another country, believing that their experience could also make them more attractive to prospective employers", she said. 'Those who study overseas have a wider outlook than local graduates. They are more independent and in terms of thinking they are more analytical, and their presentation skills are much better than local graduates, according to international business heads.'" (Chisholm 2001, *SCMP Archive*)

Another article, published in the same newspaper in 2002, describes a study conducted by

the market research firm NFO World Group, which surveyed local and expatriate teachers and employers. It found that despite 'record unemployment in Hong Kong, employers are still looking outside the S.A.R. for staff'. The reason, the article gives, is found in *the disjuncture between the 'impressive academic achievements' of locally educated job seekers and 'what employers are really looking for' – 'intangible qualities that determine how well someone will get on with their colleagues and succeed in the job.'* The Deputy Managing Director of NFO Hong Kong directly criticized the Hong Kong education 'mindset', especially the tendency to prioritise rote learning and over emphasise academic achievement. The research concludes that 'employers are first and foremost seeking people with a well-rounded portfolio of 'life' skills'... 'people who are able to display emotional intelligence at work – people with good communication skills, good inter-personal skills, confidence and a giving attitude.' (Whitehead 2002, *SCMP Archives*, emphasis added). These are the qualities, I would argue, attributed to the overseas graduate, echoing the new work-place skills described by Thrift (2000), Amin (2003), Gertler (2003) and others.

The consequences of these processes for *local* graduates are spelled out in no uncertain terms. A recent article entitled 'Local MBA graduates spurned by global firms' argues:

'Some Hong Kong business schools say that despite their growing international reputation, multinational firms still favour hiring graduates from the big overseas universities.

Both Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), whose Master of Business Administration courses are among the top-rated programmes in the Asia-Pacific region, hope to open up more job opportunities for their MBA graduates by establishing alumni networks and reaching out to multinational firms.

Steve DeKrey, MBA programme director at the HKUST, said it was the business school's 'biggest headache' to convince multinationals to assess their graduates on the same footing as their counterparts from renowned overseas universities.

'It has a lot to do with corporate bureaucracy. Much of the firms' hiring is done through their connections with business schools or alumni groups in their home countries,' he said.

Opportunities for local MBA graduates to work for multinationals started to rise after the handover, but petered out amid the economic slump in recent years, said Vincent Lai Siu-king, director of the CUHK's MBA programmes. 'Many investment banks are not hiring people at all,' he said.' (Hui 2003, *SCMP*)

As McDowell (1997) observed in the context of investment banking in London, when 'times are tough', firms will fall back on the more explicit policies of targeting 'who they know', and that often means graduates from a limited number of universities. Amidst Hong Kong's recent 'economic slump' local graduates, it would seem, have been the first to suffer.

Finally, it is interesting to note how local universities have responded to these circumstances – by encouraging their students to *go overseas*. As the following article notes, an overseas internship may yield significant material results:

'The University of Science and Technology's School of Business and Management wants more internships for its students because it will enhance their graduate starting salaries. A survey of 1,800 graduates between 1999 and 2001 showed the salary of those with internship experience to be 37 per cent more than those who had not taken part in any 'value-added' programmes, which also include exchange programmes, international competitions and a mentoring scheme. *Overseas exchange programmes led to about 10 per cent more than the average pay of \$12,000-\$13,000 for HKUST business graduates.*

Associate dean of the school, professor Tam Kar-yan, said: '*The survey results reinforce our thinking that soft skills, such as English communication, global perspective and leadership, are very important in the business world.*'

(Yeung 2003, *SCMP*, emphasis added)

As these few examples from the regional media have shown, the view from Hong Kong is very much biased towards the overseas educational experience at the same time as it devalues the local education.

### **The global language**

‘Elaine Ng, consultant with HR Business Solutions (Asia)... explained that when hiring for senior positions, firms tended to transfer people from their overseas headquarters, or found expatriates already in Hong Kong. When hiring locals, multinational companies usually preferred overseas graduates to locals because of their English skills, she said. ‘That’s one of the major things in an environment where you need English to communicate with your clients.’ (Fenton 2003, *South China Morning Post*)

Language skills are perhaps the most important, tangible form of cultural capital to have been associated with an overseas education. During interviews, ‘English’ emerged as pre-eminent.<sup>7</sup> In the following interview extracts, the issue of language is explored. Anna graduated from UBC in 2000 with a bachelor’s degree in commerce. She is now the Manager of a ‘private banking and finance’ firm in Hong Kong.

*JW: Was your [job] interview in English or in Cantonese?*

**Anna: Actually it was trilingual – it was in three languages. Here in Hong Kong, whatever job, they want you to be fluent in three languages basically. Well, they assume that you will be fluent in Cantonese and in English, that’s for sure, but if you are fluent in Mandarin that’s a plus...The people in front of me may not speak fluent Mandarin, may not speak fluent English...but they will ask questions in those languages and want me to respond to them in that language. They know whether you can really excel in that language or not, right?**

Their English is put to the test, in the work-place, on a daily basis:

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<sup>7</sup> From the Vancouver interviews with current students, it is possible to deduce their intentions, stated or otherwise, to return to Asia to seek work. Nobody suggested that their abilities in Cantonese or Mandarin would bring them advantages when job seeking in Canada.

*JW: Day-to-day, who do you speak English with?*

**Natalie: With clients. I have clients who do not speak Cantonese, and then most of the presentations are in English. 'Cause when we are in a meeting, even if there is one Westerner you need to talk in English.**

Westerners are never expected to speak anything other than English, and it is paramount, therefore, that employees dealing with Western clients are highly proficient in the language. The importance of English was not lost on current students, either, as Pete here attests.

*Pete immigrated to Canada in 1997. He is majoring in economics at UBC and intends to pursue a career as an accountant, possibly in the US:*

**Pete: ...Hong Kong is still affected by western countries, right? So...if the employers had two choices, one is from Canada, one is from Hong Kong - Hong Kong U degree - I think the employer would choose me rather than the one with Hong Kong U degree.**

*JW: Why?*

**P: I think that's because of the English level.**

*JW: Do you think employers are aware that you may not have as much knowledge as someone from Hong Kong U? Do you think that's important to them?*

**P: Well, I think that English is the most important thing that they are considering. As long as you can communicate with Western people, so they can have trade with other companies.**

### **'Ethnic' cultural capital: embodied competences and Chinese cosmopolitans**

My participants were implicitly aware of the geographical limitations of their personal cultural capital. They seemed to know, for example, that whilst their skills meant little in Canada, they would be valuable in Hong Kong, and even more so in Mainland China. They were aware, also, of the embodied nature of their cultural capital. Several

participants stressed the importance of their 'Chineseness', perceiving this as an advantage when working in Asia, and juxtaposing themselves, as Westernised Chinese, with (inferior) people from the Mainland. They emerged as true cosmopolitans (Hannerz 1996), using their cultural skills to full effect. Mitchell (1997b) captures some of this tendency in her own research on Hong Kong businessmen in Vancouver. She writes:

'In the context of increasing business opportunities across the Pacific, many Chinese transnational cosmopolitans represent themselves as Pacific Rim 'bridge-builders' [...] Clearly, the flexibility of this self-fashioning process can be useful in the contemporary global economy. As capitalist networks articulate, Chinese businessmen who speak the language of the global economic subject but are also imbricated in a Hong Kong Chinese discourse are able to operate as quintessential middlemen. With flexible citizenship and deterritorialized systems of credit, but with a durable and elastic business network established on the basis of the extended family, overseas Hong Kong capitalists can manipulate images of both the transnational cosmopolitan and the "ethnic Chinese," enabling them to position themselves at the lucrative center of Pacific Rim business.' (p. 236)

The same advantages bestowed on Chinese businessmen were granted to my participants in the professional spheres of banking and finance.

Natalie suggests some of the ways in which migration and an overseas education have been formative in her cultural development:

**Natalie: The life in Vancouver gives you another perspective, [a way] of looking at the world. I guess if I had never been out of Hong Kong for education I would not be today's me...Going to another country to study and to know that there is not only Hong Kong in the world, there is the world and Hong Kong is just part of the world, and there are many different kinds of people and things, really encourages you to think at different angles.**

In this extract, Natalie captures the essence of cosmopolitanism (Hannerz 1996). She is able to be reflexive about Hong Kong and its position in the world, just as she is aware



of her own positionality vis-à-vis others. Her outlook is global, not parochial; she *knows Hong Kong* but understands also the limits to Hong Kong, and finds herself positioned as an insider, as well as an outsider. The following interview extracts give some further insight into these processes at work.

Craig graduated from UBC in 2000 with an MSc in engineering. He now works for a manufacturing firm in Hong Kong and is studying part-time for an MBA. I asked him where he saw himself working in five years time.

**Craig:** I will look into North America again, although I think 65, 70 percent of my effort will be looking for jobs in Beijing. I have to give that a try. Given my ethnic background, my education and work experience, I would like to see if I have an advantage – a competitive edge – being an Asian with the North American exposure. To bring the other way of thinking...

*JW: Do you plan to set up your own company?*

**C:** I'm giving myself ten years to work for someone. Meanwhile I may explore alternatives to start my own business.

Anthony was trained in biochemistry in Vancouver and has worked for three years in a lab at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). I asked him about future objectives:

**Anthony:** I believe I will no longer pursue research studies or work related to research. I will try and go into the business world, so to speak. Merchants or banks, because I possess several advantages. My English is better than most students in Hong Kong and I can speak Mandarin. I know how to *handle* people from Mainland China [*his current boss and colleagues are from mainland China*]. I still know Cantonese and I can read Chinese. When you talk about efficiency it helps a lot.

*JW: You see yourself in Asia?*

**A:** I see myself wanting to stay in Asia because, as I said, China is such a big market right now. Such a hot market, that everybody's trying to get in. And

**because I have a background in foreign countries...I can tie in better with multinational companies trying to get into China. They need representatives or someone to explore. They have a saying that Chinese people know Chinese regulations better. And that's true. So they will need people who maybe have not had experience exactly with Mainland China but can tie in better.**

As I discussed in chapter 6, China looms large on the horizon for business interests in Hong Kong:

*JW: Why do you think that you will have a competitive edge in Asia?*

**Craig: My educational background and my ability to speak in Cantonese and Mandarin. They [businesses he applied to] were looking into the Chinese market.**

Danny envisages for himself a truly *transnational* future:

*JW: Where will you be in ten years time? Is it possible to guess?*

**Danny: It is possible to guess – China or Hong Kong. Because even if I graduate in Canada with the MBA, most likely the company that hires me will want me to deal with Chinese business. Maybe I will have to travel between China-Canada, China- Hong Kong, Hong Kong- Canada, something like that. This is typical. It is logical for a company to hire a Chinese student to deal with the problems of business with Chinese. You have the background, you know the system, you know what is going on right there, you know how to work in that region. So that becomes an advantage that others may not have.**

Like all of my participants, he displays a high degree of self-awareness and knowledge of the system. He knows how to play the game, and is very willing to do so to get to the top of his chosen profession.

### **Social capital and cultural capital: group identity in the valuation of credentials**

It is my contention that cultural capital is often meaningless in the absence of social capital. I agree with Lamont and Lareau (1988), who have suggested that cultural capital is 'an "interpersonal identifier" of social ranking" which is only recognized as such by those who possess the legitimate culture' (p. 158). This sub-section examines the pivotal role that social capital (or resources built on social relations) has played in the recognition and valuation of my participants' cultural capital.

The conversion of cultural capital into economic capital was a surprisingly straightforward process. Only one participant was without work at the time of their interview and several, as I will go on to show, had received job offers from large international firms in Hong Kong before their graduation (and whilst they were still in Canada). Their credentials were clearly valued in this market.

I argued, above, that the association of particular, highly desired work-related skills with a Canadian educational experience might explain some of this value. Yet there are other reasons, I propose, for the apparent success of my participants in converting their cultural capital into economic capital. I have found it useful to compare their circumstances to those revealed in William Julius Wilson's sociological study of job opportunities in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987; also 1991). The concept of 'weak labor-force attachment' provides him with a theoretical framework for explaining:

'why some groups are more vulnerable to joblessness than others. In other words, weak labor-force attachment refers to the marginal economic position of some people in the labor force because of structural constraints or limited opportunities, including constraints or opportunities in their immediate environment – for example, lack of access to informal job network systems.' (Wilson 1991, p.9).

He proposes a 'key theoretical distinction' between two major types of weak labour-force attachment - 'one derives from macro-structural changes in the broader society, most notably the economy, the other from the individual's social milieu' (1991, p. 10). I believe that my participants' 'social milieu' (or *habitus*) has determined, at least in part, their position in the Hong Kong labour market. In what follows, I demonstrate how 'social group membership' facilitated the mobilisation of various social/cultural connections, specifically with regards to participants' relatively *strong* labour-force attachment.

Mark suggests how embedded social networks may impact the worth of his own, unique cultural capital. Like all the participants, Mark is enmeshed within a network of particular, geographically specific social relations that give recognition and, hence, value to his credentials.

*JW: If you did decide to go back to Hong Kong to get a job, would employers be impressed by UBC?*

**Mark: Umm, it depends on where the employer comes from really. Because, at my secondary school in Hong Kong, three of my teachers graduated from UBC And I told them that I got into UBC and they were so happy and very proud of me too. But some people who haven't been to Vancouver they don't know. But once they've been to Vancouver and they know UBC they'll just employ you. The reputation is really high. As long as they know Canada and Vancouver.**

In several cases I encountered through this research, employers had personal knowledge of Vancouver, perhaps arising from their own history of migration, or from a wider acquaintance with the transnational networks linking Hong Kong and Vancouver. I asked Lisa if employers in Hong Kong were generally aware of the reputation of UBC. She replied:

**Lisa: Yes! They know. Because a *lot* of people from UBC come back - go back to Hong Kong from UBC. There are a *lot*. Especially from Commerce, I think.**

Craig similarly indicates the strong presence of UBC graduates in Hong Kong.

Discussing a different issue, I asked him:

*JW: Does it feel unusual to have your family so dispersed?*

**Craig: Depends who I am talking to. There are many Canadian citizens who are Chinese who are working in Hong Kong right now. So it's not surprising to be talking to a UBC grad on the street. If you hang out with them, their families are dispersed too...**

*JW: How many UBC alumni do you have contact with here?*

**C: Four or five.**

*JW: Did they graduate the same time as you?*

**C: Close.**

*JW: But you met them there [Vancouver]?*

**C: Yes.**

UBC students have built a reputation for excellence within certain firms in Hong Kong's financial district, and this reputation carries weight, increasing the value of their cultural capital.<sup>8</sup> As Yasmin shows, her specific educational background has enabled her to get a highly desirable job.

*JW: Do you think the fact that you have a UBC degree helped you to get this job?*

**Yasmin: Umm, well, yeah in a way. Because the one that I'm replacing for, he is actually from UBC as well. Actually we are from the same high school, but the fact was he was 8 years older than me. And my boss liked him and thought that**

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu (1996) has discussed the ways in which alumni can work to increase the symbolic capital held by particular educational institutions.

**reputation wise UBC is not that bad so they kind of liked to hire me. And there are lots of people from UBC who are now in Citibank. It's kind of like a reputation thing. Once you get someone working well in that company they will look at your resume and think, 'oh you are from *that* university. You're not bad' right?**

The high school connection suggests how transnational social capital may work at an astonishingly small scale. Perhaps these links between Hong Kong and Vancouver are better conceptualised as 'translocalities' (Smith et al. 1997). Anna's description of her own experience of job seeking breathes life into the concepts of 'social capital' and 'transnational networks'.

*JW: Do you think that your education at UBC helped you to get that job?*

**Anna: Definitely. I think without UBC I would not have been able to get that job, because the major corporations here, especially the foreign corporations in Hong Kong, they will look very closely at where you graduate, which school you graduated from. UBC definitely has a great well know name here in Hong Kong and Citibank and some of the major financial corporations here and the foreign investment big corporations here, actually they love hiring UBC students. No matter which faculty you're from. As long as you are not too bad...That's what I've heard and that's what I know so far after I have been here working for more than two years now....**

*JW: Do you think that there are a lot of UBC grads working in these big corporations?*

**Anna: Oh, definitely! All of my friends, nearly, if they graduated from business or economics...are all around this area - the financial area here in Central.**

This brief extract conjures up the real processes by which Anna's social capital was built and expanded, as she interacted with friends, soon to be colleagues, in the lecture halls and coffee rooms at UBC's business school. In her life, and in the lives of all of my participants, Vancouver and Hong Kong constitute a 'single field' of social interaction (Basch et al. 1994), transnationalism in the truest sense of the term.

All the participants were attuned to these embedded transnational connections and the power vested in them to open doors to various careers. Danny said that he had known it would be easy for him to find a job in Hong Kong. Employers, he argued, had a preference for credentials from UK, US or Canadian institutions above others. I asked him to explain this and he replied:

**Danny:** OK, the employers, many of them were graduates from Canada, US, UK too. They *were* the graduates, they *were* the Canadian citizens, UK citizens or U.S. citizens already. *So they know what we are already. And they find that better because they find that easy to manage, easy to work with.* (Emphasis added)

*JW:* You have more in common with them?

**D:** Yes, such as my boss. My boss, the managing director, OK I just found out! He graduated from McGill. Yeah, that's true! I didn't know until this week. Someone told me. I didn't ask. You wouldn't ask your boss 'where did you graduate?' And the other director, he graduated from Imperial College in London.

Natalie provides a similar account of her own experiences:

**Natalie:** Actually, the boss who hired me was working in Toronto, I think in the tax department or the government department. The way he came back was that he was stationed in Hong Kong and now he is stationed in China. So he was like a mobile Canadian. He would not consider himself a Hong Kong Chinese.

At the very least, I would suggest that these claims indicate the need for a geographically sensitive account of cultural capital. The social and historical context of transnational links between Vancouver and Hong Kong are crucial in the production of valuable cultural capital through migration and return. Both Danny and Natalie bring to life the importance of social group membership – the fact that employers and employees are often part of the same 'overseas club', and thereby share an intangible sense of affinity

hardly grasped in an 'objective' qualification. Human capital theory cannot come close to understanding these nuances of credential valuation.

From the late 1970s onwards, sociologists have contributed substantially to a body of research around the concept of 'social capital'. In an impressive overview of this work, Lin (2001) concludes concisely that 'social capital refers primarily to resources accessed in social networks.' (p. 81). Bourdieu provides a more substantial definition:

'Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name [e.g. a family or of a school]...' (Bourdieu 1986, pp. 248 – 249)

For the purposes of this thesis, the two most important aspects of this definition are: a) that these social networks are based on 'mutual acquaintance and recognition', and b) that they indicate the holder's entitlement to various forms of 'credit'. It is my contention that cultural capital, as described in this thesis, depends substantially upon social capital in the final instance of conversion in the labour market.

The particular view of 'social capital' I adopt derives from a tradition of examining the role of social networks in 'status attainment' (Lin 2001). This body of work has considered, in other words, how social capital can be used to advance personal socio-economic status. Fernandez and Weinberg's (1997) research on the hiring practices of a retail bank demonstrates a useful application of the social capital concept. Their data derive from one particular bank in the US ('part of a large, globally diversified financial



services institution' p. 886) and consist of 5, 568 initial employment inquiries. They were especially interested in how applicants had become aware of a job opening and whether a current employee had referred them. Their discussion is salient to this thesis in a number of ways, particularly regarding the role of social networks in aiding my own participants in their job search and subsequent promotions.

Fernandez and Weinberg's review of existing scholarship on the role of social ties in job searches and hiring led them to conclude that employees hired through personal contacts perform better on the job than other hires. Social ties provide employers with additional information about an applicant that may not be available on a CV (i.e. information on non-institutionalised forms of cultural capital). People hired via personal contacts are therefore assumed to be better matched to a job than people hired in other ways. They are consequently presumed less likely to leave the job, to have lower absenteeism, and to receive better performance evaluations. Fernandez and Weinberg found that 27 percent of external 'non-referrals' are granted interviews, compared to 79 percent of 'referrals'. When considering job-offer rates, they found that 'referrals' are offered jobs at *three times the rate* of external 'non-referrals'. They examined factors at each stage of the job-application process and found that the benefits of social recommendations compounded.<sup>9</sup> My research provides some qualitative support to some of their findings. The majority of my participants found their jobs through referral by

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<sup>9</sup> They have offered several possible explanations for this result. Employers may perceive referral policies as a way of encouraging bottom-up involvement in personnel decisions. They may therefore take employees referrals more seriously – "by soliciting referrals [...the company] is, in essence, asking employees to put their personal social networks to work for the company" (p.899). Other reasons involve post-hire outcomes. Employees may give the newcomer additional information on the job, facilitating their initial transition. And, newly employed persons may also perform well as a consequence of a sense of social obligation to the person who referred them: "newly hired employees may be concerned with how their on-the-job behavior affects the reputations of the people who referred them" (p. 899).

current employees. Most of those who referred them were part of the same overseas-educated club.

*The following focus-group participants all worked for different large wholesale companies in Hong Kong.*

*JW: How easy was it to get that job?*

**Carl:** I was lucky because I was referred by one of my friends. Actually she was my uncle's friend. He said, 'oh you like sport right? I have a friend who owns a sport wear company and if you don't have a job then I can introduce you. I went for the interview and I got the job. Maybe one of the reasons is my friend.

**Annie:** Hong Kong is all about connections. Relationships with companies, like referrals. You won't get jobs easily if you don't have referrals from others, friends, family.

**Carl:** Relationships.

**Betty:** I didn't but I'm an exception. It's almost a must in Hong Kong.

**Carl:** It's not a must. You *can* get a job on a regular basis, but it's...easier for you to get a job maybe with more benefits.

**Betty:** Actually it's easier for you to get a *better* job – a job that you really want to do.

*JW: Is that missing in Vancouver?*

**Betty:** Yeah, we have not many connections because we all immigrated to Vancouver, so we don't have many friends in Vancouver.

Annie faced similar problems looking for work in Canada:

*JW: Did you look for a job?*

**Annie:** I *tried* for a month, a month or two, and there was no reply at all...Since all my friends are leaving then I just come back [to Hong Kong]. And my dad is here so I have a place to stay. I had to have support from my family, some financial support. I don't see there's much problem. If I can't find a job I can just go back any time I want.

*JW: How easy was it for you to get a job when you came back?*

**A:** Pretty easy. I tried to find an agent and the agent helped me to find jobs. There were a lot of jobs, there were about five of them. There were lots of connections with my family too, like, my dad had some connections and my cousins had some connections. So I tried to interview for the job and they just hired me.

Ian explains how social capital helped him get his foot in the door in Hong Kong:

*JW: Can you explain how you got your first job?*

**Ian:** Well, first job, in Hong Kong sometimes you apply through the newspaper but usually they ask for experience. It is usual to have some referrals, from family and friends, if they can introduce you to someone else, that kind of stuff. That's how I got my first job, to be honest. And luckily I can perform up to standard so I didn't get fired! And my first job is actually at Deloitte and Touche, an accounting firm, at the corporate finance department doing mergers and acquisitions.

Social networks, leading to referrals, can operate transnationally. In more than one case, participants mentioned the possibility of receiving job offers from Hong Kong whilst they were still living in Vancouver.

*Yasmin graduated from UBC in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in commerce. She now works for Citibank in Hong Kong.*

**Yasmin:** I had no intention of going into a bank – but then my friend told me that there was this position available in a bank and that's why I looked onto Citibank's web page and there's the posting of what I want, and so I applied for it and *then* I came back to Hong Kong.

*JW: So you applied before you came back?*

**Y:** Yes, but then they tried to call me but I had left my Vancouver contact so we were like running around chasing each other. Eventually he found me and I started work two weeks after I went back to Hong Kong. I'm glad I found this job before 9/11 because some of my friends who didn't find a job then, they ended up coming back to Vancouver.

And in another example:

**Betty: ...a few of my friends doing civil engineering at that time, they got a job already in position before they went back to Hong Kong.**

*JW: They applied from Vancouver?*

**Betty: Yeah, they sent their CV I don't know, they may have connections with some people, they may have, but before the convocation they were working.**

The experiences of my participants demonstrate the resources that can accrue from being in possession of a durable network of transnational social relations. These resources are, indeed, fundamentally dependant upon, if not “acquaintance” then certainly the *mutual recognition* that arises from being part of a common ‘cultural community’ (Collins 1979). There are several different levels to this recognition. At the crudest, there is the ‘overseas educated’ club, members of which comprise persons currently living and working in Hong Kong who received a substantial part of their education in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia or, to a lesser extent, New Zealand. Proficiency in English and a cosmopolitan outlook binds this community. Then there are the Canadian educated, superior, in the eyes of my participants, to holders of a less rigorous Australian degree, although sometimes inferior to those who attended a British institution or a well-known US school. (Distinctions between institutions seem to be important when Canada and the US are discussed.) And finally, for most of my participants, a UBC degree set them apart in the specific context of international financial institutions in the Central district of Hong Kong. As ‘insiders’, many employers were able to demonstrate an understanding of the nuances of *local* and *regional* educational geographies, as Natalie attests:

**Natalie:** And also it depends on what is the name of the university that you graduate from. For example, in Canada, if you said to somebody you are studying in Vancouver the first thing they will ask you is if you graduated from UBC. Because UBC is, you know, the top. And then if you are not, then 'are you in SFU?' and stuff like that. And if you say, 'oh I am from U of Alberta', then they will perceive you as of lower class. For example, if you are in Toronto they will ask you if you are at Queens or U of T. If you say that you have not graduated from a university but from a college, say Capilano College, then you are even lower. So they will rank the university.

*JW: That's not a formal ranking, I guess?*

**N:** Sometimes they will look at the university rankings in the magazines – Time or Fortune. I think we had one for Canada. And then one that mixed the Canadian U's with the States U's. They will look at that. And also...my ex-boss...when he saw my CV he said, 'oh this is very good. You graduated from the University of British Columbia.' It is a very well known, famous U in Canada. So he will make that kind of impression.

It is interesting to briefly surmise the extent to which my findings support or otherwise the conclusions of Mark Granovetter (1973) on 'the strength of weak ties'. His conclusions (that weak social ties have greater utility in job-seeking than strong family ties) fly in the face of some more established understandings of the resource-potential of family and friends within immigrant communities. In relation, specifically, to Chinese populations, studies of *guanxi* have tended to emphasise the affective and familial quality of ties (Gold et al. 2002). In Ong's (1999) influential work on wealthy Chinese migrants, the family is central. Indeed, familism has dominated scholarly and popular accounts of successful Chinese business strategies (Wong 1985, Tai 1989, Berger 1990, Mitchell 1995, Olds 1988, Olds and Yeung 1999).

Only a handful of my participants intended to work in family business (primarily for the economic reasons discussed earlier), although many more had used family connections to get their first job. On the other hand, alumni networks were apparently

extremely important, and some of these links could be described as very weak ties (in the case where one participant had not even met her predecessor, and yet was offered his job on the basis of their university 'connection'). My sample is perhaps too small to make a decisive contribution to these debates. The conclusions that I draw on this issue are mixed.

### **Keeping fit: a work-life imbalance?**

'An inevitable feature of 'flexible career' patterns is that they are inherently insecure. It is no longer simply a question of gaining access to a superior job, but of maintaining one's 'employability', of keeping fit in both the internal and external market for jobs through the acquisition of externally validated credentials, in-house training programmes, social contacts and networks' (Brown 1995, p. 36).

In what is widely perceived as an economic climate of risk and uncertainty, employees in Hong Kong's financial services have to work hard to maintain their advantage. In what follows, I examine the nature of this work, revealed in participants' excessive social networking, unrewarded overtime, lamented personal lives and the perceived need to seek further qualifications in order to maintain employability and insure against redundancy. I begin with a discussion of the practices involved in the maintenance and expansion of social capital.

### **Corporate sociability**

According to Bourdieu (1986), the 'reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed' (p. 250). The building and reaffirming of social capital is not just seen as beneficial to individual employees - firms recognise the

resources that emanate from the social capital of their employees (Coleman 1988) and therefore encourage these forms of sociability as part of the job. Dicken (2003) describes the characteristics of business organizations involved in international financial centres (such as Hong Kong):

‘Firms must be sociable. Contacts are crucially important in generating and maintaining a flow of business and information about business. ‘Who you know’ is, in this sense, part of what you know’... [and] ‘relationship management’ is a vital task for both employees and firms’ (p. 463)

Because of the importance of ‘sociability’ in building strategic work-place connections, social life takes on new meanings, as do ‘friends’. Social interaction is central to ‘communities of practice’ (Amin 2003, Gertler 2003), involving the transfer and development of tacit knowledge. There are a variety of spaces in which ‘work-place’ interaction takes place outside the space of the office (Thrift 2000, Amin 2003), as I found through my interviews with UBC graduates in the financial district of Hong Kong.

After explaining that she has ‘no personal life’, Jackie went on to describe her activities ‘outside’ of work:

**Jackie: Tennis and golf, I play regularly. Tennis, because we have some colleagues who play when we have courts available here so...and we do golf too. Sometimes we go to the driving range and sometimes we set up a golf trip and we go to Mainland China.**

*JW: Is that with your colleagues?*

**J: Yes, my colleagues. ‘Cause my friends don’t play golf much. And usually when I get to see my old friends we like to go to dinner and drinks so we can chat more.**

Participants frequently described these types of activities; 'work' socialising constitutes a significant portion of their social lives, and social relations are highly differentiated between 'work friends' and 'real friends'.

I interviewed Gemma and Henry in a restaurant below their office in Central, downtown Hong Kong, during their lunch break. They work for the same large and (according to its web site) 'pre-eminent global financial services company', which operates in over one hundred countries. Their interview underscored the importance of sociability and 'networking', typifying the strategic accumulation of social capital (the development of social relations *now* to be used at a *later date*). Gemma described 'connections' as a 'very important' aspect of her professional life. Henry explained:

**Henry:** I am building up my relationships now and I think that I can have it when I want to use it, in the future. Networking, social, like, things like that. For example, on Saturday and Sunday you want to take a break yourself, you want to stay at home reading [or] sleeping, but you cannot do this. You know that. You have to hang out with your friends, to build up your relationships, not staying at home reading by myself.

*JW:* Even that is work then?

**H:** Yes, maybe. I treat them as my friends too, but I want to have more friends. Not my best friends but friends that I can talk to...

**Gemma:** They can help you when you need them.

**H:** Yes, they can help me or I can help them.

The pressure to socialise in one's 'free time' is evident from these extracts. Henry is aware both that social capital may not have immediate financial returns, and that it is a reciprocal relationship. He perceives value in expanding his friendship networks, 'to have



more friends'. An intriguing distinction between 'friends' and 'best friends' emerged as the interview progressed.

**Henry: Nowadays I think it is hard to get a best friend. My best friends are the ones I knew when I was studying in high school. Nowadays if I know a new friend I think it is hard to be a best friend.**

**Gemma: Friends from your work place, you won't become best friends.**

*JW: Why?*

**G: Competition with them. You don't know what they are doing, you don't know what they are thinking.**

There is little time available for 'best friends' in their lives: real friendships take second place to networking and the development and maintenance of strategic social capital. I asked if they were frustrated by the necessity of spending time with colleagues/potential colleagues and they replied that it is 'natural'. Even within these friendship networks, hierarchies of trust clearly exist. They take advice, they told me, from a former, older colleague, with whom they do not feel in competition.

**Gemma: One of our friends told us that you don't waste your time on people that can't help you. You must hang out with those that can help you – who have the ability to help you when you need them... He is forty something and is very experienced. He has worked in large firms, the top financial institutions.**

This kind of networking/socialising does not, they told me, come easily. You have to be a certain, 'aggressive' kind of person (and that is not them!). Gemma went on to give concrete examples of how these 'relationships' may have a direct, material impact on hiring practices. Henry suggests that these sociological factors may be especially prevalent within the financial sectors.

**Gemma:** But it really helps if you have those networks. Some people who don't have experience in the industry and know nothing about it but still she can get a job. Hundreds of people applying who have experience, who have a couple of years of experience, were more qualified than her. But she got the job. Why? Because she knows the head of the department so she got the job.

**Henry:** *Especially* in our business. In the banking industry I don't think there's someone reading the classifieds to get a job. Everybody was introduced by somebody, *everybody*.

Social capital, then, can have clear implications for job prospects. This is not some vague notion, but an understanding they have that is born of personal experience. Gemma hopes to put her own social capital to good use some time in the near future. She explained:

**Gemma:** Because the firm that I'm working for is not the one I want to work for. If I know someone else, if I know someone in a better firm, I think I can get a better job.

*JW:* Are you working on that?

**G:** Yeah. We have ex-colleagues and the ex-colleagues go to different firms, so we can keep connections with them...You won't tell them that you hang out [with them] for that purpose.

I got the sense, also, that the cultivation of social capital is more important now than it has been in the past. Many of my participants expressed insecurity about their jobs and a more general pessimism about the future of the Hong Kong economy. Perhaps, under these uncertain circumstances, even more reliance is placed on connections. As Henry explained it: 'Because of the economy, *everybody* is using their relationships'.

### **Putting in 'face time'**

Another consequence of a general mood of uncertainty is the pressure to put in longer and longer hours at the office, doing, as expressed by one participant, 'face time'. Clearly, the quality of personal time is sacrificed to work and every one of the Hong Kong participants lamented this fact. For those in the banking industry, a typical working day would involve twelve hours at the office. I asked this question about working hours of all my participants. Rees's response is somewhat standard (the tone in which this response was delivered indicated acute dissatisfaction with these circumstances).

*JW: What is your typical working day like?*

**Rees: I was going to say it's like 12 to 12. Twelve midnight to 12 midnight, 24 hours a day ... I start, maybe, at seven thirty 'til 8 or 9 at night. This is normal. If there is anything going on that is abnormal, that will take you 'til past midnight.**

*JW: How did you learn to cope with that?*

**R: I haven't. It's still very difficult.**

Ian discusses his experiences of long working hours:

**Ian: ...my first job was actually at Deloitte and Touche, an accounting firm, at the corporate finance department doing mergers and acquisitions. I did that for three years and really bust my arse – it's really hard. I once had a project, I worked from January to July, seven days a week, eight-thirty in the morning to three-thirty in the morning. At 7 o'clock the aircon is shut down, by 9 o'clock the office became so hot we were stripped down to just shorts.**

*JW: How did you function like that?*

**I: We *had* to function like that. The show must go on, there is no option. But at that time I am one of the more junior people. At the accounting firm you have juniors, which are like cannon fodder.**

There is, as Tammy suggests, a general social pressure to remain in the office over and above what may be deemed necessary for the job:

**Tammy:** Yes, it's definitely long hours in Hong Kong [...] It's actually funny because for the same job in Vancouver, people who graduated with me and stayed in Vancouver...the latest they get off is at eight, which is like a big shock to them already. You get home at eight in Vancouver, that's pretty late right? You can go to Safeway but that's about it. But for me, getting off late would be at 12. And you know I still wouldn't be complaining because everyone else is still in the office.

Rees was very direct in his portrayal of the impacts of and reasons for these types of work practice in Hong Kong:

*JW: How does that affect the quality of your life?*

**Rees:** Oh yeah, it's just, like, down the drain. I would prefer to stay in Vancouver in terms of location and everything. Too bad they don't have the industry there that I want to work in. I think the quality of life in Vancouver is much better [...] I mean, people get off work at five. If they want to play golf they get off work at four. They go to work at ten if they had a drink the night before; if they didn't then nine-thirty. But in Hong Kong they want you there even if you have nothing to do. They want to see your face there in the office. And people are putting in a lot of face time in case people get fired, and it won't be them.

*JW: Is that [redundancy] a possibility for you?*

**R:** I think so.

Because of the constant threat of redundancy, overtime is expected and is not rewarded. As Tammy concisely stated: 'if you don't work overtime don't worry, they will fire you and find someone else.'

Jenny was also interviewed during her lunch break – the only time she could afford me. I asked her to describe her work:

**Jenny:** In a sense it's quite interesting because we are doing treasury of the bank – the dealing rooms – so it's quite exciting...But because I'm on the marketing side, the sales side, I need to meet targets and in that sense...It's too much...It's very stressful, because I would dream of my profit and...Stuff like that. It's not boring but the hours are too long and the pay is not too good.

*JW: Do you feel that your job is your life at the moment?*

**J:** I have no time outside of work, yeah. 'Cause when I get out of work it's like seven-thirty and I have dinner and then I get home and it's 9 o'clock and I have to go to sleep because I have to get up by six. So I don't have a life outside work.

For Yasmin, who works for Citibank, a typical working day would be thirteen or fourteen hours in the office. She explained:

**Yasmin:** [You are] expected to work for that long. No overtime...I think I am giving my life to this company. I really don't have a personal life. I get to see my friends less and less often. They are busy too, but it's hard to get together these days [...] but it's just the start of my career so, that's the way it is.

The sense that participants are giving their lives to their work was one evoked frequently. And yet, no alternative is ever considered. I wonder about the extent to which the *habitus* conditions such an attitude.

Life in Vancouver has, nevertheless, provided a frustrating source of comparison for some. The issue of quality of life in Vancouver has been discussed elsewhere in relation to business immigrants (Ley 1999). Anna, who says that she and her colleagues 'work like robots', raises this point:

**Anna:** After work we usually go out for supper...But usually after supper you are just so tired you just like to go back home and sleep. But this is the general culture here. It's not healthy but this is what everybody is doing because there's just too...many things to do...So you will never have the working style like the one in Vancouver – start at nine and then get off at four-thirty or five. It won't happen here in Hong Kong.

Olivia was unusual in that she had experienced work in Vancouver prior to moving back to Hong Kong. Her husband, who received an attractive job offer, initiated the move. The contrast was stark:

**Olivia:** It was totally different from what it was like in Vancouver. Because for one thing it was one of the most busy kind of jobs that I took up. It was in advertising [...] And secondly I think it is the people's mentality in Hong Kong. For singles, or even people with kids nowadays, they really get one hundred percent involved with their jobs, regardless of work hours. No matter how late they work, it's fine. It's a fact. Before you take up a job you have to be really mentally prepared that you have to be, you have to sacrifice a lot of your own time...I work long hours...

*JW: What kind of hours?*

**O:** Like, ten to eight, ten to nine, ten to ten, ten to twelve. Yeah, yeah, I mean I usually stayed in the office 'til midnight on Fridays because I just didn't want to get into the office on Saturday so I want to get my jobs done.

In those rare moments of free time, the two most popular activities mentioned by participants were watching TV and sleeping. There was a real sense of exhaustion. 'Umm...the weekends? Yeah, I mean...I just want to stay home and just watch TV. Just do nothing' (Olivia).

### **Pursuing 'rarer goods': specialisation and the MBA**

'In today's economic climate, professionals need more than just a degree to survive.'  
(Yeung 2001, *South China Morning Post*)

Collins (1979) has written that, with the democratisation of education, the 'end point' of schooling has moved consistently upwards, from high school degrees to undergraduate degrees, to graduate level and increasingly specialised further qualifications. He exemplifies this point with the emergence and subsequent explosion of the MBA

[Master's degree in Business Administration] – an academic programme unheard of a hundred years ago, but now leading the trend towards specialisation in education. This is even more salient today than it was when Collins wrote, twenty-five years ago.

As access to education has widened, so the differences *between* institutions (and even *courses within* institutions) have become more significant. A further aspect of Bourdieu's analysis lies with his discussion of the creation, since the 1970s, of new spaces of cultural capital accumulation:

'the development of an entire set of new institutions, schools of management, marketing, advertising, journalism, communications, etc., which came along just at the right time to serve the innumerable independent, yet objectively orchestrated strategies by means of which the adolescents of the business bourgeoisie and their parents were attempting to circumvent the increased rigor of academic law.' (1996, p. 197)

Not only does this specialisation indicate the emergence of new forms of differentiation within education, but it also suggests another strategy in middle-class attempts 'to step up their investments so as to maintain the relative scarcity of their qualifications and, consequently, their position in the class structure' (Bourdieu 1984, p.133, emphasis added). This strategy involves prolonging the process of education so 'individuals invest more time in ascending the hierarchy to the scarcest and most valued credential' (Brown et al. 1997, p. 9). As a result of both credential inflation and specialisation, 'elite occupational status' becomes attached to 'longevity within the system' (Collins 1979). The implications are captured by Hirsch (1977), who writes:

'the...excess of apparently qualified candidates induces an intensification of job screening that has the effect of lengthening the obstacle course of education and favouring those best able to sustain a longer and more costly race. These are the well off and the well connected' (p. 50, quoted in Brown 1995, p. 38).

It is a class issue: a strategy by higher socio-economic groups to preserve their capital, with the (perhaps unintended) effect of reproducing their privilege through both raising the level, and changing the types of qualifications demanded by elite occupations.

‘If this is the case then part of the explanation of the expansion of tertiary education should be located in the competition for credentials rather than in any straightforward link between education and economic productivity. Understood in these broad terms, the demand for credentials may well be a function of the pressure of an increasing middle class keen to secure their children’s future.’ (Brown et al. 1997, pp. 9 - 10)

In Hong Kong, faced with a very high degree of competition in schools and universities, middle-class students have two principal means by which they can guarantee the value of their credentials through ‘scarcity’. One, as I have discussed, is to go overseas. The other is to stay in education for longer than the norm, and to channel this time into pursuing a very specialised degree. The explosion of MBA programmes (with increasing specialisation recently emerging *within* these programmes) is, I would argue, a reflection of such strategies. These programmes are particularly popular with transnational middle-classes attempting to circumvent increased competition in their local academic fields.

These general tendencies were unmistakable in my interviews. Sixteen out of 28 of the Hong Kong research participants mentioned, without prompting, the issue of further qualifications. Six already have a higher qualification: three with MBAs, one CMA [Chartered Management Accountant], one CGA [Chartered General Accountant] and one post-graduate diploma. One participant is currently studying for a part-time MBA. Nine perceived a higher degree as inevitable, although the firmness of their plans varied. Frequently, further education was discussed in terms of ‘distance learning’ programmes



or, alternatively, *moving again*, to the UK, Canada or the US. Just like as in the pursuit of a first degree, the value of further education has a crucial geographical element.

Alluding to 'credential inflation', a few participants explained their intentions in terms of a general competition for jobs. More usually, however, they were discussed as part of a prevalent pessimism about the future of Hong Kong and a strong sense of personal job insecurity. And they would seem to be justified, backed by SAR economic statistics. An official government report recently claimed: 'Along with the economic slowdown, *labour market* conditions slackened considerably over the course of 2001. As employment was unable to match the growth in labour supply amongst more widespread corporate downsizing and lay-offs, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate surged from 4.5% in the first quarter [...] to 6.1% in the fourth.' (2001 Economic Background, p. 5). This pessimism is also matched in (and perhaps spurred on by) media reports. The following example makes explicit reference to the trend in postgraduate degrees (Yeung 2002, *SCMP*).

### **MBA applications rocket amid downturn**

Hong Kong is experiencing a boom in postgraduate education, with applications for some MBA programmes up by 25 per cent. This reflects a worldwide trend in which more people are upgrading their qualifications in the wake of the global economic downturn. Applications for MBAs were reported by the Financial Times to be up in Asia, North America and Europe. 'In North America, we have about double the number of applicants compared with last year,' said Dr Lawrence Tapp, Dean of the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario, Canada, during a recent visit to Hong Kong. 'The MBA is counter-cyclical. When jobs are down, more do postgraduate study.'

The school's Asia branch in Hong Kong, which was considering offering its MBA programme locally, was seeing similar demand for its EMBA, he said. Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) reported a 25 per cent increase in applications from last year for its part-time MBA programme, on which 200 places were available. It ranked among the most popular postgraduate programmes at the

university, while other favoured options also tended to be vocational, such as computer science and social work.

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) reported a 10 per cent increase in demand from last year, receiving 600 applications for its 158 part-time MBA places. Enrolments in Open University (OUHK) postgraduate programmes soared by 166 per cent between 1997 and 2001, with the MBA topping the list of popular programmes. A quarter of postgraduate students there were enrolled in it.

The MBA market, however, is approaching saturation. An estimated 100 MBA programmes are now being offered by local and overseas providers, albeit with varying quality.

Predicted by Bourdieu and others, this momentous growth in MBA programmes would seem to be the middle-class solution to expanding access to higher education, and the consequent pressure for higher-end jobs. The article continues:

Recent years have also seen a growing number of MBA graduates pursuing a second Master's degree. 'They are pursuing specialised degrees in corporate governance or accounting, seeing them as a form of value-addedness,' said OUHK marketing strand leader Alan Au Kai-ming. OUHK was planning to offer Master's programmes in finance, human resources management and marketing, he said. More students now funded themselves rather than being subsidised by employers, said Oliver Yau Hon-ming, associate dean of the Faculty of Business at City University, but he expected the demand for MBAs to continue.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of these programmes is their prohibitive cost. The article notes that one third of EMBA programmes are paid for by employers. That leaves two thirds of students who are incurring costs of over HK\$150, 000 for a two-year part-time course (Yeung 2002). The reality of social exclusion is really quite stark.

Furthermore, the opportunities for MBA graduates in China, where demand far outstrips supply, are frequently and emphatically stated in local media. The following article, which appeared in the *South China Morning Post* in 2002, is one of many making a similar point:

Hong Kong MBAs are in demand in China, where 350,000 senior management posts will open up in the next five years, writes Clara Li. The market for Hong Kong-trained MBAs is extremely lucrative in China, but graduates should have China experience, speak fluent Mandarin, and be familiar with the cultural environment, say mainland industry experts. China will need 350,000 senior managers in the next five years but has only 15,000 MBA graduates in the country, according to information released by the Ministry of Education.

China produces 5,000 to 10,000 MBAs a year, according to information gathered from local media and market research - more than double the number it could train two years ago. But even that number is still far short of the demand for MBA-qualified people (*SCMP*, Saturday February 2 2002).

Turning now to my data, I want to demonstrate as best I can the prominence of the MBA for these Canadian graduates. In this first quotation, Anthony displays the foresight and awareness typical of my participants. Presently he works in research in Hong Kong, and wants to change profession. I asked:

*JW: Have you thought of doing another degree?*

**Anthony: Yes. ...Because I lack a business background, if possible I will do an MBA in the future. But I'm not sure when.**

*JW: You will try and get a [business-related] job first?*

**A: Yes, yes, because the MBA right now requires work experience. For example, UBC requires two to three years.**

*JW: Is it difficult to get on an MBA course?*

**A: It is difficult to get into a renowned MBA course. I was accepted by a college right after university. Into Central Michigan University, who does it at Kingston College in Vancouver.**

*JW: You didn't do it?*

**A: Yeah, I didn't do it...Because the GPA requirement's 2.5, it's C+, and it requires no other test, so I got in just based on my undergraduate scores...It's scary because why do they accept [me]?...Because you learned already at that time that MBA requires some experience, that MBA is hard to get into...What's the value of that MBA? And it's really cheap to do. So you really have a lot of questions and you don't want to waste time.**

*JW: So what would be your top ranking school for an MBA in a few years?*

**A: Well...umm...obviously anyone would want to go to Harvard to do it. But it's extremely expensive. It's like...100, 000 dollars Canadian for one year. And the programme is two years. So it's like 200 000 dollars to get the graduate degree. Although you make....1.3 million in Hong Kong...so that's how much?... you make about 300, 000 or 250 000 Canadian per year. So it's a good investment, but it's hard to get in anyways. Extremely hard...**

*J: So realistically...?*

**A: Realistically I would think about Canadian schools. Because I was from that system and it's easier for me to interact. And the reputation is also very renowned...UBC is actually very renowned...actually a lot of people know that school. Brand name nowadays. *Laughs* But I would consider university of Toronto, McGill or Queens...**

*JW: Do you know when you'll do it?*

**A: I'm not sure, I'm not sure. Hopefully [in] 3 or 4 years. I have to save up some money and get some experience.**

*JW: And so the next step is to get a job in a bank?*

**A: That's going to be hard. For study they don't actually require you to be in a bank or something like that. They require you to be in a good company, in any job, hopefully business related. But Queen's actually has a science and engineering MBA, so they accept people from that background. Yeah, that's going to help. And Cornell actually has it. So these two schools can help because they actually have that specialisation. They actually have the programme to accept specifically those background people. But for other schools...they want more of a business background so to speak.**

Anthony raises a number of interesting issues in this one quotation. He understands the necessity for work experience before he can be accepted onto a 'renowned' MBA

course. He alludes to some of the less reputable courses that have emerged in response to a global demand in higher education and specialist degrees (discussed in Section One). He has set his own standards high, but is limited by the extreme costs of some of the 'better' courses, yet at the same time perceives these as 'a good investment' (resounding with the earlier discussion of the marketisation of higher education). He talks about the branding of different institutions. At no time does he refer to the intellectual or practical content of these different courses. His concern is with how they will be perceived by potential employers. Ultimately, however, I am struck (as with most of my participants) by Anthony's knowledge of different education systems, his implicit understanding of the global geography of cultural capital, and his ability to place himself within this larger scheme of things. This insight, I am convinced, has enabled my participants to make choices not open to other social groups.

I asked Danny if he had any intentions of starting a family:

**Danny:** Right now, it's hard to say. At this moment I have plans to study again, to study more. Right now I've done three years of work in Hong Kong. I'm applying for an MBA. I've applied to those in Hong Kong and to those in Canada and I may apply to City U of London in the UK. And I may try Cranfield.

*JW:* Why do you want to get an MBA?

**D:** A Bachelor's degree is not enough, first of all. And second of all, this is related to me. I'm not suited to engineering.

*JW:* What do you want to do?

**D:** More on a business nature. Working in Hong Kong and working in Asia, a business degree may have more advantages than an engineering degree. The business degree is more important because Hong Kong is more business oriented. In the future China is more business oriented.

Like many of my participants, he is focussed on the possibility of a future in Mainland China. He has not ruled out the possibility of going back to Canada for the MBA.

**Danny: Going back to Canada sounds logical. I might find the environment easy...I don't have to adapt to another system again. And secondly, I've got Canadian citizenship so I can share some of the advantages of the local students. And thirdly, it's an overseas education! Once I graduate there I will be able to look for a job opportunity right there in Canada or in the United States, instead of Hong Kong.**

At the time of the interview, Craig had been studying full time for an MBA for 6 months, with one more year to go. He was working for the government at the same time, on free-lance projects related to his study.

*JW: At what point did you decide to come back to Hong Kong?*

**Craig: I was working in Toronto. After graduating I moved to Toronto and then I was looking into MBA programmes at UBC, U of T, and programmes in Hong Kong. I thought I would like to try Asia for my career.**

*JW: Why did you decide to do an MBA?*

**C: After a couple of years I saw my limit.**

*JW: You weren't going to progress?*

**C: Or I would have to wait a long time.**

Craig regards an MBA as the logical next step in his career progression. I wonder at the extent to which the limits he describes are geographical as well as personal. In the next sub-section of this chapter I consider the geographical limits to participants' cultural capital.

Jackie weighs up the pros and cons of quitting her job and going overseas for the MBA:

*JW: Have you got any plans for further education?*

**Jackie:** Yeah, I want to do an MBA. I'm still thinking of where to go. Personally I don't really want to do an MBA at UBC 'cause I looked through the courses and they are actually using the books that we've been using in commerce...So I'm thinking of going somewhere else, either the States or I might even go to the UK 'cause I thought I've already got the North American exposure, I would like to do something else.

*JW: Have you got plans? I assume that you would give up your job?*

**J:** Yeah. If I stay in Hong Kong and do an MBA here then I won't quit my job. I will do it part time and I won't miss any opportunities here, in Asia. But if I quit the job and then go to the UK. that would be, like, a totally new environment for me and, like, a different story. So that's why I'm kind of struggling which way to go.

*JW: What would be the advantage of going to the UK apart from exposure to a different cultural environment?*

**J:** Either way, in the States or the UK, I want to get into a reputable university. In terms of education, I think it's pretty much the same. And actually I also have relatives in the UK so, yeah, my aunty is there. So I can also expect to stay there.

*JW: How drastic would it be to give up your job?*

**J:** In the current economic environment...there are lots of people who have MBAs nowadays. I even have, some of my colleagues who have MBAs are doing the same job as me. We have the same position. So it really doesn't help in the current situation. So that's why I'm not really keen on getting this MBA right now.

*JW: So why do it?*

**J:** It's like, you have to have a Master's degree to survive these days...It has become even more critical than before. So I think I might not get this within a year or two, but definitely within five years.

*JW: Do you have any plans to get married and have a family? Or do you have no desire for it?*

**J: No, no, not at all.**

Ian describes in equally stark terms, the imperative to constantly 'upgrade' one's cultural capital:

*JW: Are you thinking of leaving [your current job]?*

**Ian: I think if I can get an EMBA in the next few years I'll move on.**

*JW: Have you made some moves towards doing that?*

**I: Yeah, well, actually in Hong Kong there are quite a lot of MBA programmes. Right now I've got a commerce degree, then a certified general accountants degree, but then in Hong Kong if you want to move to senior management positions in big corporations or even the medium organisations - medium sized – maybe an MBA would be the key to the gate, at least to the interview room! So you have to look for opportunities. People are always upgrading, even if they are out of work they upgrade themselves for future opportunities, so you've got to catch up, there's no excuse. So in terms of the MBA you have two choices. You either quit your job and go into the MBA, or you stay in your job and go into a part time MBA. If I quit my job it's really hard to get a job when I get back. So that's why I'll keep working and earn an MBA.**

*JW: Part time?*

**I: Yes. There are some quite good universities in Hong Kong doing exactly that. One is Kelloggs, doing a programme jointly with Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and another is actually Western Ontario. They actually fly their professors to Hong Kong to teach. Both cost half a million.**

*JW: Does Western Ontario have a good reputation?*

**I: They say the world ranking is around sixteen, eighteen, something like that.**

*JW: How do you find the ranking?*

**I: Some publication. If I get a degree from a university of such high ranking, people in Hong Kong, they trust the UK, US. and Canadian destinations more than anything else. And of course they look at the ranking of the university. UBC has got quite a good reputation in Hong Kong – a pretty OK standing I think. And Western Ontario's MBA is also quite famous I think, so it should be good.**



Very savvy to current economic and social circumstances, these graduates are ambitious and motivated, yet apprehensive for their futures. They do not perceive an alternative way of life for themselves. Most do not entertain the prospect of marrying and having children (a very different situation from that of their parents).

### **The geography of cultural capital: a double-edged sword?**

In conclusion to this section, I want to consider another side to social capital and cultural capital as experienced by my research participants: their potentially negative effects. As Portes (1998) has written in reference to social capital: 'it is our sociological bias to see good things emerging out of sociability; bad things are more commonly associated with the behaviour of homo economicus' (p. 15; see also Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, Portes 2000). Discrimination inherent in the labour market may limit the value of immigrants' cultural capital and social capital in the 'host' society (Lamont and Lareau 1988, Ong 1999). Ong (1999) has directly challenged Bourdieu for his failure to address these aspects of cultural capital:

'Bourdieu has never suggested that there are any structural limits to the accumulation of cultural capital other than the shifting criteria of what constitutes cultural capital in time and place. His notion of symbolic capital is wedded to the idea of what he calls the archaic, or "good faith," economy and static reproduction. But where this is accumulation and credit, there must be loss and debt. Indeed, the reproduction of social power, especially for the newcomer deploying start-up symbolic capital, is never guaranteed or certain, especially when he or she embodies other signs – for example, skin color, foreign accent, and cultural taste – that may count as symbolic deficits in the host society. Thus, in transnational movements, newcomers may have acquired cultural capital that they may have difficulty converting into social capital because of the perceived mismatch between the distinction of their symbolic capital and their racial identity...' (p. 91)

‘Although emigrant families rely on economic capital for conversion into cultural capital, their ability to acquire new symbols of power often outstrips their ability to decode and manipulate cross-cultural meanings in foreign locations. This jeopardizes the social reproduction of their power abroad.’ (p. 95)

Thus, whilst the majority of my participants claimed long-term intentions to return to Hong Kong, *some* did allude to barriers to employment opportunities as a consequence of racism in Canada. It is possible, also, that the intention to return to Hong Kong noted throughout these empirical chapters has, underlying it, a sense of the ‘reality’ of the limits placed upon their particular cultural capital outside of East Asia:

**Rees: I think for the Chinese it is easier to find a job that has more prospects in Hong Kong because there is no glass ceiling. In Canada and the US you can only go to a certain level. I’m sure you can’t get up to the CEO level right? But it is usually the Americans who run the American companies.**

*JW: Why is that?*

**R: Well, I would say half discrimination and half is just...I don’t know, a clash in culture maybe.**

A few participants had sought work in Canada before deciding to return to Hong Kong:

*JW: Did you send off your CV in Canada?*

**Tammy: Well, I did, but there was no response so...Laughs Actually, it was a harder decision for me [to come to Hong Kong]. I don’t have a house here because my parents are in Vancouver. Basically they are settled in Vancouver. My first choice was Vancouver, but I knew it was going to be hard to find a job so my second choice was Hong Kong. But I did really work hard to find a job in Vancouver. I accumulated work experience and worked at the Bank of Montreal during the summers and things like that. But it still didn’t work out. In my fourth year I still didn’t get an offer from a CA firm. And I guess the problem for me was that I was really focused. I want to be a qualified accountant so I was restricted to CA firms and once they didn’t give you an offer then obviously you have to go somewhere else.**

*JW: How did you know about the potential for employment in Hong Kong?*

**T: [It's] the general perception. Let me give you an example. Like for my firm in Vancouver, I know the year that I graduated they hired ten people. In Hong Kong they hired 120 people. And also at the same time they gave preference to overseas students as well in Hong Kong.**

*JW: Is that an explicit preference?*

**T: Not really...It is obvious. For example, the interviews are conducted all in English. So you have an advantage. Whereas in Vancouver I actually have a disadvantage when you are comparing to Caucasians or locally-born Canadians [...] Actually I think there is obvious discrimination in Vancouver [...]In my class for accounting for my year - the top three - none of them got offers from the big firms. One got hired by the government, two came back [to Hong Kong], whereas the locally...people who are really good presenters, they got hired.**

The same perception of discrimination existed for the US:

*JW: Did you consider getting a job anywhere other than Hong Kong?*

**Evan: Yeah, sure, I would like a job in the States first, but I think that I can get a job easier in Hong Kong than in the States, because Hong Kong speaks Chinese and I am a Chinese and I can speak English. But in the States I think my chance is minimized, because I am a Chinese and there is racism. Of course I think so.**

*JW: Did you actually apply to the States?*

**E: No, but I heard cases from my friends that they can't get promotion in the States and they have less chance to work in a proper position.**

*JW: Where do you think you might be working in ten years time?*

**E: I think it doesn't matter. What matters is your job, the purpose of your job. If I can work in Singapore as a manager then I will go there.**

*JW: Why Singapore?*

**E: Because it's a financial centre and it is more active than in Hong Kong. Singapore is still an Asian country and there are Chinese there.**

*JW: Is it an issue of your personal, cultural preference or is it an issue of discrimination?*

**E: Of course, there must be a fear of discrimination or racism.**

It is difficult, however, to draw any decisive conclusions about the reality of racism as a structural limitation upon cultural capital from these comments, not least because, as I have consistently maintained, cultural capital is geographically embedded and spatially variable and its valuation may depend on a whole host of different contextual factors. I noted earlier that the value of my participants' cultural capital in Hong Kong was at least partially dependent upon the *scarcity* of that cultural capital. The English skills so coveted by employers in Hong Kong are clearly commonplace throughout North America. I also noted that, in Hong Kong, participants have a host of social networks that may help them secure employment and promotion. In Canada, generally, these networks are either significantly less developed or non-existent. It is logical, therefore, that immigrant students will find that their cultural capital is relatively more valuable in Hong Kong.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY**

‘Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flow and movement others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.’ (Massey 1993, p. 61)

‘A general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognized as economic, [...] must endeavour to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another.’ (Bourdieu 1986, pp. 242 – 243)

At its inception, this research was concerned with exploring an ostensibly idiosyncratic tendency amongst certain immigrant groups to acquire foreign educational credentials through family migration. It sought to examine the specific case of Hong Kong immigrant students in Vancouver, and graduate returnees in Hong Kong, to uncover the symbolic meanings and material implications of the ‘overseas education’. In conclusion, I would like to suggest that the thesis speaks to larger issues than are implied by this remit; in this final chapter I attempt to draw the arguments of different sections together and, in so doing, underscore how I believe it contributes to a more geographically sensitive understanding of the recent transformation of education through internationalisation, and coterminous student mobility, at multiple spatial scales.

I would like to highlight once again the salience of Collins’s (1979) thesis on the ‘credential society’ in conceiving the contemporary significance of education. More than ever, educational credentials are used as a means of social differentiation and

stratification. The polarisation of employment opportunities in the post-industrial society as described by Sassen (1991) has placed a premium on both 'knowledge' and specialised training and made education an urgent requirement for ascension to, and reproduction of, middle-class status (Brown 1995, Brown et al. 1997, Ball 2003). At the same time (and since Collins wrote his thesis), access to education has ostensibly increased everywhere, just as it has been 'standardised' through the implementation of various benchmarking, measurement and assessment tools. At first glance we would seem to be moving towards a more meritocratic society, where 'success' is based on objective academic achievement (Young 1958).

In fact, as access to education has (by some measures) increased so social inequalities based upon existing patterns of social stratification have been either maintained or intensified (Bondi and Matthews 1988). As I have argued, and as Bourdieu (1984) describes here, different social classes are differentially placed (both spatially and socially) in relation to capital, with fundamental repercussions in respect to their ability to access and accumulate its varied forms:

'To account more fully for the differences in life-styles between the different fractions – especially as regards culture – one would have to take account of their distribution in a *socially ranked geographical space*. A group's chances of appropriating any given class of rare assets [...] depend partly on its capacity for the specific appropriation, defined by the economic, cultural, and social capital it can deploy in order to appropriate materially or symbolically the assets in question, that is, its position in social space, and partly on the relationship between its distribution in geographical space and the distribution of scarce assets in that space. (This relationship can be measured in average distances from goods or facilities, or in travelling time – which involves access to private or public transport.) In other words, a group's real social distance from certain assets must integrate the geographical distance, which itself depends on the group's spatial distribution and, more precisely, its distribution with respect to the 'focal point' of economic and cultural values, i.e. Paris or the major regional centres...' (p. 124, emphasis in original)

Throughout this thesis, I have concurred with Bourdieu that the accumulation of cultural capital depends on the prior possession of capital. I have also stressed, however, the fundamental importance of *spatial mobility* in affording *access to capital*. The significance of mobility (and particularly long-distance mobility) upon relative access to different forms of capital is insufficiently theorised in Bourdieu's account of capital accumulation in relation to social class. In this thesis, I have argued that *transnational migration* has transformed the spatial scale of cultural capital accumulation.

One crucial impact of neoliberal ideology upon education systems has been the imperative to 'standardise' through measurement, ranking and quality assessment. Far from 'levelling the playing field' of educational delivery, however, these measures have had the opposite effect: drawing attention to the *differences* between education systems and thereby creating new maps of varied cultural capital. At the same time, and intimately connected to these processes of standardisation and differentiation, we have seen the proliferation of a discourse of 'parental choice'. As I have shown, the exercise of choice invariably depends upon two key variables: access to capital (social, cultural and economic) and the ability to be spatially mobile. Several studies have shown that working-class families are generally unable to exercise 'choice' in education to the same extent as their middle-class counterparts (Ball et al. 1995, Ball 2003, Butler 2003, Holdsworth 2003). There is little doubt that neoliberal educational reform has established new forms of social exclusion determined by *access to capital* and *spatial mobility*.

International education signifies the emergence of these processes at a global scale. As Massey (1993) has observed regarding the contemporary experience of 'time-space

compression', some social groups are empowered by the ability to travel, whilst others remain excluded and, thereby, dis-empowered. In Hong Kong and elsewhere in East Asia, the return of graduates possessing their 'overseas' qualifications (and various other forms of 'embodied' capital) serves to *devalue locally derived cultural capital* and *reinscribe social stratification based on educational differentiation* despite the fact that, on the surface, educational reform in East Asia has widened access to educational opportunities amongst the general populace. More than 70 percent of students at the two main Hong Kong universities are from 'working-class' backgrounds (Lee and Cheung 1992). This is one of the most striking illustrations of the fact that the terrain over which class status and educational 'choice' is fought has shifted, through the internationalisation of education and an emergent global map of cultural capital, to incorporate a transnational geographical space.

I have also stressed the geographically contingent and contextualised nature of both cultural capital and social capital. This statement by Hannerz (1996) on the nature of cosmopolitan knowledge provides an apposite contrast to the argument presented in this thesis:

'[I]t may be worth considering the possibility that there is some kind of affinity between cosmopolitanism and the culture of intellectuals. When locals were influential, Robert Merton (1957: 400) found in his classic study, their influence rested not so much on what they knew as on whom they knew. Cosmopolitans, in contrast, based whatever influence they had on a knowledge less tied to particular others, or to the unique community setting. They came equipped with special knowledge, and they could leave and take it with them without devaluing it. Not surprisingly, there has been more attention given to such people recently. They are "the new class," people with credentials, decontextualized cultural capital.' (Hannerz 1996, p. 108)



On the contrary, I have argued that this 'new class' of international students and graduates understand well the variability of the value of cultural capital, inextricably connected to its geography. They are cognisant also of the importance of particular social connections in its recognition and exchange. I have shown, through empirical examples, that the 'value' of the 'overseas degree' is embedded in both particular places and specific, trans-local social networks.

### **Future trends in international education and student mobility**

To conclude, I want to draw attention to the recent British Council (2004) report on the predicted future of student mobility<sup>1</sup>, providing an insight into the continued relevance of the arguments made in this thesis. Global demand for international student places will increase, it asserts, from 2.1 million (in 2003) to 3.3 million in 2010, and 5.8 million in 2020. Of particular interest, however, is the manifest *geography* of these trends. Currently almost half (47 percent) of all international students attend higher educational institutions in *just 5 countries*: the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> By 2020 these countries alone will be host to 2.6 million students, of which 71 percent will come primarily from a small number of countries in Asia (compared to 12 percent from Europe).

The report predicts that between 2003 and 2020 international students will display 'less diversity' on a number of fronts: in the countries and regions of origin, in the subject areas of study, and in the levels of study. In 2003, 5 Asian countries (China, India, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore) accounted for 58 percent of the global demand for

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<sup>1</sup> *Vision 2020: Forecasting International Student Mobility* (2004)

<sup>2</sup> These countries are termed the 'main English-speaking destination countries' or 'MESDCs'.

international student places; this will increase to 75 percent by 2020, and 94 percent of total 'Asian' demand will come from those five countries. These predictions are based in part, the report states, upon 'the large unsatisfied demand for higher education places' in Hong Kong, China, India and Malaysia at both undergraduate and graduate level. 'The higher demand levels from Asia are also a result of the relative income growth rates compared to other regions' (p. 48). As for the issue of 'subject' diversity, different national statistics are impossible to compare. For the UK, however, a clear pattern is emerging: business studies have dominated and will continue to dominate student demand.

'East Asia and South Asia are driving the growth in demand for business studies, with compound annual growth rates of 9.9 percent and 7.5 percent respectively over the forecast period. Demand for business studies from East Asia is predicted to grow from almost 14, 000 in 2003 to almost 34, 000 in 2010 and 74, 000 in 2020.'(p. 56)

By 2020, 70 percent of all demand for business studies by international students will come from Asia.

The third area of interest highlighted by the report concerns students' 'level of study'. The report predicts a further retreat from demand at undergraduate level towards taught graduate-level courses. The relationship to funding is particularly pertinent. Currently, 86 *percent* of international students on 'postgraduate taught courses' are *privately* funded (compared to 75 percent at undergraduate level). The trend in private funding by international students is predicted to grow into the future and will reflect a worldwide change in the funding of higher education. The British Council has noted: 'The trend towards individual private funding of higher education across the world will grow as more and more countries seek to increase the prices charged for their higher education

programmes to meet the costs of delivery. This applies to both domestic and international students.’ (p. 64). In the UK, in 2006, tuition fees for university will be introduced, marking an historic break in the delivery of free domestic higher education. Universities can charge up to £3 000 a year under these new regulations. Government funding for UK higher education has been halved over past 20 years; 40 years ago 6 percent of 18 – 30 year olds in the UK went to university; now 43 percent of this age group are in higher education (*The Guardian* 2004). The current government wants to see 50 percent in higher education by 2010. As higher education around the world becomes more commonplace, so the value of a *local* undergraduate degree will decrease through the process of ‘credential inflation’. In its empirical and conceptual contribution, my thesis suggests some of the repercussions to these emergent and seemingly inexorable socio-spatial trends.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Table summary of primary fieldwork data and methods**

#### **In Canada:**

- 50 semi-structured interviews and short questionnaire with current post-secondary level students in Vancouver (1 hour duration)
- Interview with Manager of International Education at Vancouver School Board (VSB), Vancouver
- Interview with an ‘educational consultant’ working between Vancouver and Taiwan
- Interview with Director of the international office, University of British Columbia
- Interview with the Inspector of Independent Schools, Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools, BC Ministry of Education, Victoria
- National level data from Statistics Canada
- Provincial level data from BC Ministry of Education and BC Stats
- Figures for international students in Vancouver public schools (from VSB)
- National level data and analysis from the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE)

#### **In Hong Kong:**

- 23 in-depth semi-structured interviews with returnee graduates of Canadian institutions (1 – 1.5 hours duration each)
- Interview with former head-teacher and employee of the Hong Kong Department of Education
- Discussion with current Hong Kong-UBC alumni committee members
- Observation and informal ‘chats’ at two education fairs (the first a British Council initiative and the second organised by the Hong Kong government)
- Census data and statistics from the Government Publications Office and the Department of Education

- Focus group with 5 returnee graduates from Simon Fraser University (2.5 hours duration)
- Research into newspaper archives and examination of contemporary reports
- Questionnaires to 5 multinational corporations in the financial services industry